University of Alberta

Striving to be a Constructivist Leader

by

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DEDICATION

Most people live in a very restricted circle of their potential being.
We all have reservoirs of energy and genius to draw upon of which we do not dream

William James, 1899

In: Genuine Reality: A Life of William James by Linda Simon

This thesis is dedicated to my loving wife Charlene and to my daughter Korenn and son Kolby who have given me their unwavering support throughout my education process. I will forever be grateful for your constant encouragement that has caused me to claim the vast hidden possibilities of my life. You have taught me the difference between knowledge and wisdom, how to live a funfilled life and how to care about others.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> During this past century concepts about learning and leading have been influenced by similar historical, philosophical, and cultural ideas. Learning and leading are intertwined because these conceptions arise from our understandings of what it is to be human. To be human is to learn, and to learn is to construct meaning and knowledge about the world. Constructivism, therefore, has emerged as an important educational perspective that is changing how educational researchers, writers, professional developers, and leaders view the world. This learning perspective has given rise to the recognition that constructivism is critical to adult and organizational learning. This perspective has also required a reexamination of the concept of leadership, and a new definition has taken form – a definition that we have called "constructivist leadership."
>
> *Linda Lambert*
> The Constructivist Leader (2002, p. 34)

Lambert notes that constructivism is about meaning making, or constructing one's own social reality. In the same way that my experiences as an administrator have shaped my understandings of leadership, my personal journey provides context for this study. Therefore, I begin by sharing my experiences and thoughts about leadership.

Throughout my 16-year career in education, I have assumed a number of formal roles within educational organizations. Transfer and promotion collectively resulted in my placement in six different schools fulfilling the roles of teacher, assistant principal, and principal. These roles resulted in my experiencing positive feelings such as excitement, joy and fulfillment as well as feelings of insecurity, frustration, uncertainty, emotional uneasiness, and personal isolation: a scenario similar to that described by Elsberry and Bishop (1996).

My personal experiences as a teacher and assistant principal, working alongside other administrators, have all served in some way to shape my own leadership style. I was more specifically affected by my appointment to the assistant principalship, the focus of this position being a training ground for the principalship. As I look back over these experiences, no matter what the individual leadership style or school focus, relationships have always been the driving force for my own personal growth.

As an assistant principal I was given latitude to experiment with my leadership style. As I look back, I believe that my performance at that time could be characterized as a kind of blend of traditional approaches to leadership (as will be discussed in chapter 2). I didn't know about the constructivist approach, nor could I have labeled the approach I did use. These early leadership experiences, however, deepened my understanding of our social nature and our attempts to gain meaning through interaction with others. As a result I became focused on relationships and realized that they played an important role in my personal development. I began to think about administration and staff in a new way. In particular, I wondered "how I could get all staff members to share in the vision" (Notice the traditional view of what a principal is to do that is embedded in that statement. I was already starting to feel a discomfort with such views.) and the leadership of the school in order to provide a meaningful environment for students, staff and parents. My appointment to the position of principal at Winterburn School provided me with many opportunities for exploring new ways of performing as a leader. This is where I was first challenged to develop my own leadership style within the framework of constructivism (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 26).

Upon my appointment to the principalship, I became uncomfortable with the expectations that I placed upon myself. As a result of my strong belief in nurturing relationships, I placed high expectations upon myself as problem solver, trying to be involved in every aspect of school life. My belief was that if I could do everything I would be successful. I realized that I could not do it alone, I needed a team to do the job, and the notion of sharing this responsibility was of prime importance to me in order to succeed.

As I look back now, I can see that what I thought, initially, to be "shared leadership" was very different than what I experienced as time went on. My original assumptions were quite naïve in that I saw shared leadership as a vehicle used solely for the delegation of responsibility to staff members. Even so, through the process of working together, staff members seemed to develop a sense of "I can do this."

The Journey

The journey began as a process of trial and error that involved building, tearing down and re-building. I now can see it as a journey of introspective change that instilled the need for transparency and trust. This process allowed all of us at Winterburn to observe, interact and experiment with each other's vulnerability. For me, this period of reformation was about learning how to give up power in order to empower (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 43).

Constructing Change

I found that through conversations we as a staff began to acknowledge that we really didn't totally understand all of the ramifications of shared leadership, but felt that it was something that we needed to explore in order to improve student achievement. As a staff most of us realized that we would need to lean on one another and learn from each other. At times, however, the reaction was mixed. Some teachers claimed that they "had enough work to do" and that they didn't need to spend their time in study groups learning about all of this "philosophical stuff" that they did not see supporting their classroom practice.

With time even the reticent "some" began to understand that any discontent they felt was due to a lack of understanding of their role as staff members.

The “some” had not previously thought about the benefits of mentoring and that they needed to mentor one another and that we were responsible for one another’s learning. Through discussion over time, staff members moved to an acceptance that it was time to work on our relationships. What we came to believe we thought was a set of relational walls built up, at times was due to personal egos or caused by frustration caused by the consistent challenges of teaching. It was through this thinking process that we as a staff came to the understanding that collective success would require collective responsibility. The way we worked as a staff needed to change.

New Beliefs

With time, while there still seemed to be some teachers who struggled with relinquishing the old hierarchical order of leadership and the perceived convenience it brought, beliefs began to change. I found myself facing similar struggles as I realized I needed to relinquish much of the authority that is traditionally attached to the role of the principal. After six months, it seemed new beliefs emerged: We as a staff began to see ourselves as teachers to all students. What I noticed in particular was that teachers gave up the convenience of handing over discipline problems to administration and began dealing with discipline in a different way. Further, after six months, I sensed that teachers no longer saw collaboration as sharing lesson plans, photocopying for one another and working together with a buddy class; action research was no longer seen as taking away time from classroom planning and preparation; and feelings of responsibility to share in the leadership process increased. Not only did teachers and staff members share in leadership, but I believe they began to see themselves as responsible for building and extending leadership capacity in one another. What indicated this to me was a change in relationships. Relationships became based on communication described as a continuous process of professional development. There seemed to be a shift as teachers in general became highly motivated to take on innovations as a result of a new perspective gained or a new skill learned for the purpose of enhancing student achievement. The most striking observation was through this process we as individuals were coming to realize that each of us had the potential and the right to work as a leader. These shifts included parents. Parents saw themselves as partners, building trust relationships with us, the staff members. Most importantly, through these progressive shifts I was beginning to form a new image of the principal's role.

A Preface for More

It is through this personal experience that being a leader took on new meaning for me. Although unintentional at first, I observed that the teaching staff as well were beginning to see and experience the benefits of the constructivist approach at work (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 6). This experience left me with wanting to know more. I wondered what the experience would be like in a school where the principal came to the experience with an understanding of constructivism and would encourage shared leadership among all those in the school (Lambert et al. 2000).

Research Question

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995, p. 3) was to explore the ways in which leadership was played out in a school in which the principal had embraced the notion of constructivist leadership. Stoney Creek School was selected for its reputation as a school that encouraged reciprocal learning as a tool for constructing meaning around the ways students learn. The principal, staff and students have brought reputed success to the school and community. The investigation focused on how leadership was experienced and expressed at Stoney Creek School. The general research question that guided this study was: How is leadership experienced and expressed in a school in which the principal acts to "mentor"[1] leadership of all those in the school? The specific research questions guiding this investigation were:

1. How do those in the school community (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) view the principal's participation in the community?

---

[1] Mentorship is a "powerful relationship context for personal conversation. . .while the mentoring relationship is initially uneven, it is nevertheless imbued with a caring investment in the growth of each other." (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 69)

2. How do those in the school community (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) believe leadership is being sustained?
3. How do those in the school community (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) view the development of relationships within their school community in which the principal acts to mentor leadership?
4. How do those in the school community (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) experience mentorship?
5. How do those in the school community (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) think about themselves as leaders?
6. To what extent, and in what ways do school community members (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) reflect conceptions of leadership that are "constructivist"[2] in nature?

7. What do those in the school community (eg: parents, students, staff, principal) perceive to be the challenges, contradictions and constraints of developing leadership within the school?

---

[2] Constructivist leadership is conceived as "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling." (Lambert et al., 2002, p. viii)

Justification for the Study

The general justification for studies such as this relates to Levin and Riffel's (1997) call for more effective leadership in our schools which they suggested is necessary due to schools having been insufficiently responsive to changing social and economic conditions. This perceived "leadership crisis" is evidenced in the contradictory views of leadership in society and in a genuine fear of change and risk taking (Bennis, 2002).

As provinces adopt more stringent standards for student achievement and implement testing systems to assess progress, the conversation about leadership changes from an emphasis on the process of improvement to a results orientation (Levin, 2000; Lambert, 2002). Levin (2000) stated: "the work of teachers and administrators appears to have become more difficult, but the experience of students does not seem to have changed very much" (pp. 155-172). This concern and the drive toward growth in student achievement has resulted in a demand in school districts for constant improvement. Together, these circumstances seem to serve as a sort of unconscious conspiracy, which has entrenched traditional, technical rational approaches to leadership in our schools. Bennis (2002) provided the following insight into the current state of leadership:

> As a nation, as organizations and as individuals, we fear taking risks. The context of our work and personal lives reinforces a set of common values, attitudes and perceptions that discourage us from standing out in a crowd – that calls for playing it safe. (p. 3)

Similarly, leaders in key Canadian companies admit that their organizations do not have the leadership capacity needed to succeed in today's highly unpredictable business environment. The Conference Board of Canada, for example, reported:

> "We've taken a pulse-check on the state of leadership among a select group of Canadian companies," says Prem Benimadhu, Vice-President, Centre for Management Effectiveness and co-author of the report. "What we found is that current strategies for building leadership capacity are largely ineffective, out of touch, and too focused at the top of the organization."
>
> According to the Conference Board report, building leadership capacity ranks as the top challenge companies face in keeping pace with the changing business environment. But current leadership development policies and practices need to be fundamentally transformed to focus on generating leaders at all levels of the organization.
>
> In today's turbulent and highly competitive business environment, the task of leadership has become a responsibility of everyone in the organization. (news release – Conference Board of Canada, OTTAWA, December 14, 1999, p.1)

More specifically, within the field of education, leadership effectiveness has been a topic of concern since the early 1980's (Murphy, 1990, p. 24). Levin (2001, p. 196) suggested:

> that education reforms to date have focused largely on governance, structures and system rules. He says that "they have rested on a belief, sometimes articulated and sometimes not, that changing institutional arrangements would lead to better educational outcomes. Yet education happens very much in individual schools and classrooms, and the link between structural arrangements and school practices is not necessarily a very close one. All the evidence suggests education policy would be better if it focused on what might really make a difference to learners. (Hopkins & Levin, 2000)

Levin (2001) observed:

> the reality is that we do not know how to solve the educational and social problems we face. Success is not a matter of simply implementing someone's nostrum. The problems are deep-seated and multi-faceted. In such a situation the only way forward is to focus on experimenting and learning. Education reform needs to take the best evidence we have, to try a variety of strategies that seem to have some empirical or conceptual support, to assess their results, and to make changes accordingly. Given complex systems, limited understanding and multiple intervening factors, it is vital to pursue reform with a strong set of commitments but a relatively open mind as to how they can best be fulfilled. (p. 198)

Levin (2001) emphasized that while there is no magic formula for improving learner outcomes there are some important things that can be done. He suggested "they could include improving teaching skills, providing better supports to learners, and strengthening connections with parents and communities" (p. 1960). Levin (2001) surmised:

> this focus would likely pull us in two directions. First, we would focus on those things within the school that might really affect student outcomes. Second, we would pay more attention to schools' relationships with some of the critical contextual factors that shaped students' lives. (p.196)

Levin (2001) encouraged politicians, civil servants, lobbyists, educators, parents, students and researchers to participate in a process by which they all can contribute to and benefit from, a process that "focuses on informed discussion about education, irrespective of one's starting position and values" (p. 198). Macpherson (1996) suggested that:

> for leaders to claim they are educative means they must be able to develop and maintain a climate that promotes inquiry, values problem solving, welcomes criticism, and encourages participation and learning about organizations. Openness to

> criticism and an ability to learn from mistakes becomes the basis for more valuable leadership action and cycles of reflection and decision making. (p. 139)

In the context of these observations by Levin and Macpherson, Rost's (1991) definition of leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" seems useful when examining leadership capacity on educational teams (p. 102). Just as Walker (in Lambert et al., 2002) used the metaphor of weaving a whole cloth with multiple strands, I believe that constructivist leadership can help school leaders to make sense of the different demands and conceptions of schooling that are held by educators, policy-makers and researchers as they deal with the need to meet provincial standards. The premise is that constructivist leadership can serve to facilitate effective implementation of standards-based reform, authentic assessment, and constructivist based accountability (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 3).

Most constructivist studies have focused on the classroom (Mechling & Oliver, 1983; Wallace & Nesbit, 1996; Rhoton, Field, & Prather, 1992). This study's focus is broader, providing a documented case study exploring the relationships among staff, students, parents and principal in a school setting. The theoretical significance of the study, then, relates to its contribution to the literature specifically about constructivist leadership in schools.

The practical significance of this study resides in its potential for informing principals and school districts about possibilities, challenges and constraints of constructivist leadership. Linda Lambert has done important work, both theorizing about constructivist leadership and documenting the influences of constructivist leadership on schools and school districts. It is my belief that this study contributes to the advancement of current understandings of both theoretical and practical perspectives on constructivist leadership.

Chapter Two:
Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the "Evolution of Educational Theories of Learning and Leading" offered as a context for understanding the roots of constructivist leadership and to contextualize my study. The overview culminates with discussions of "Constructivist Leadership" and "Broadening Concepts of Constructivist Leadership" and a justification of the conceptual framework used in this study.

Evolution of Educational Approaches to Learning and Leading

To understand the foundation of constructivist leadership, one assumes one must accept that theories of learning and leading are inextricably linked and share parallel themes (Lambert et al., 1995). Looking at the concepts of learning and leading from a recent historical perspective helps to develop an awareness of the connection between past events and current educational theories. It is important to understand that ideas about learning and leading continue to evolve, however, they are influenced and at times dominated by traditional perspectives (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002). It is important, therefore, to understand these earlier perspectives. Accordingly, in what follows, I outline the prevailing assumptions of "dominant eras" in learning and leading: traditional, behavioral, grouping/tracking/situational, effectiveness and instructional leadership, and community of learners and community of leaders (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002). This attempt to categorize various schools of thought is complex as each era experienced the influence of multiple schools of thought. Although various movements in learning and leading dominated specific eras, each world view continues to exert some influence in schools today (Lambert et. al., 1995).

Heck and Hallinger (1999) in their article "Next Generation Methods for the Study of Leadership and School Improvement," also write about different "worldviews" that influence school leadership. Just as is Lambert's work, their work is helpful in understanding the historical and theoretical contexts of constructive perspectives of leadership. Hence, after reviewing Lambert's views on the evolution of educational approaches to learning and leading, I examine Heck and Hallinger's suggestion that "various theoretical perspectives cluster around different types of research questions, leadership interests, and methods of study" (1999, p. 143). The following discussion adopts these scholars' framework and uses the following headings, which correspond to the various theoretical perspectives they propose.

Traditional Approaches

Historically it has been assumed that the school was an extension of the community and would reflect its values. However, even with democratic values being central to the initial purpose of schooling, traditionalism prevailed and an emphasis on the principal as a dominant leader obscured the democratic process. The principal's job was to ensure teachers conformed to expectations through a hierarchical process, which resulted in schools not reflecting the democratic values that were intended to be their underpinning (Rost, 1991; Mitchel & Tucker, 1992). Principals set the standard for job performance using authority-based supervision practices. This and similar approaches set the course for early schooling. The authority-based approach expressed itself in the classroom in the form of rote memorization and seatwork (Glickman, 1993). Traditionalism is still evident in various forms including back to basics curriculum resources, strict discipline in which students are not part of the decision making process, and appeals to introduce school uniforms. In a school with a traditional approach, shared leadership is not promoted and there are clear authoritarian lines for dealing with administrative issues (Glickman, 1993). This approach is at the opposite end of the learning-leading continuum from constructivist learning.

Behavioral Approaches

Behavioral theories of learning assume a direct relationship between applying resources and results in achievement (input/output). In a behavioral construct of leadership, the principal is responsible for the quality of teacher performance and for using rewards and sanctions to ensure the same (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002). Specifically, in the classroom, teachers break down large concepts into mini-concepts, specific skills are taught in isolation and rote drill, practice and large group instruction are the key methods for teaching. Behavioral leadership is likened to transactional leadership in which the principal's role is to shape teacher behavior through rewards for appropriate behavior in much the same way that the teacher shapes student behavior (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). Burns (1978) asserted that transactional leadership "requires a shrewd eye for opportunity, a good hand at bargaining, persuading, [and] reciprocating (p. 169).

Grouping/Tracking/Situational Approaches

This theory of learning and leadership emphasizes the grouping and tracking of individuals by ability. Within this approach, it is assumed that students with learning difficulties, when grouped and taught with students having similar difficulties, will eventually acquire the necessary skills and catch up with their peers. Braddock and McPartland (1990) are among those who noted that, in reality, these students never catch up; they actually get further behind, limiting their post-secondary opportunities.

"Situational leadership" approaches reflect the same set of assumptions. Such approaches define the leader's job as one of influencing the attitude and/or behaviors of others through a planned approach which takes into account the differing characteristics and abilities of the followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1972, p. 8). Within this framework it is the leader's job "to learn to deal with the different abilities of teachers and manage them successfully; and that teachers will naturally sort themselves into high, average and low performing groups, much like students" (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002, p. 19). Approaches to teacher training which claim that training consultants can move teachers to higher levels of performance by varying their approach are often based on similar principles (Glatthorn, 1984; Glickman, 1993; and Robins & Alvy, 1995). Hershey and Blanchard's (1972) situational leadership approach suggests that leaders must be flexible in their approach to employee supervision. They suggest that there are various categories of behavior and corresponding treatments for each. Glickman's work claims a continuum of leader behavior, from directed to nondirected, correlated with particular levels of teacher development. His work forms a transition between the situational leadership approach and developmental approaches that focus on teachers' capacities for growth.

Effectiveness and Instructional Leadership Approaches

Lambert et al. (2002) observed that the School Effectiveness Movement grew out of research that was done as a result of the Coleman Report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman et al., 1966). A key finding in the report was that parent income and parent education were by far the strongest predictors of student achievement. As a result of further research done as follow up to the Coleman Report, a new body of research was established related to learning or teaching effectiveness, which focused on classroom practices designed to improve student achievement. In this approach teachers focus on the alignment of curriculum, teaching methods and assessment in a "kind of mutual nudging in a profoundly cooperative search for answers" to instructional problems (Dowling & Sheppard, 1976, p. 5).

Furthermore, direct instruction (Brophy & Good, 1986; Hunter, quoted in Brandt, 1985) surfaced as a style for teaching basic skill acquisition. The effective teaching approach calls upon educators to consider the degree of influence that the teachers have, and how important it is to understand what should be done to promote positive results in the lives of children – "with regard to school achievement, positive attitude toward school, interest in learning, and other desirable outcomes" (Stronge, 2002, p. 1). The school effectiveness movement attached itself to two basic beliefs that still underscore reform movements today:

> the belief that all children can learn (argued much earlier by Bruner) and the recognition that when teachers hold high expectations for student achievement and press for academic performance, students tend to meet those expectations. (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002, p. 20)

Andrews (in Brandt, 1987) asserted that the effectiveness literature that contributes to the knowledge bases of learning and leading shows a correlational link between instructional leadership by the principal and student achievement. Literature on instructional leadership promotes the need for formal leaders to pay attention to what goes on in classrooms through direct observation and focused discussion, participating in staff development, participating in professional development, being visible in hallways and classrooms, and ensuring that teachers have the tools to do the job (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Little & Bird, 1987).

Walker emphasized that, parallel to the effectiveness theories of learning and leading, "excellence" literature in business emerged (in Lambert et al., 2002). Both education and business perpetuated the idea of there being a set of effective leadership traits. In both fields successful leaders were observed in order to obtain information about how effective leaders perform for the purpose of training others. The theory of effectiveness as applied to both learning and leading drew heavily on the behavioral movement. The fact that it was superimposed on schools for promoting equity and increased achievement didn't allow for growth of relationships, which lessened the impact of the effectiveness movement on teaching and learning.

Community of Learners and Community of Leaders Approaches

The metaphor of the "community of learners" arose in response to a metaphor that had dominated educational dialogue since the industrial age, the "school as factory" (Lambert et al., 2002). The image of the school was that of a "rational-technical system of production" (Murphy, 1990, p. 2). In contrast, the community of learners notion allowed for opportunities to explore and develop a new set of assumptions based on various events that took place throughout the century (Saphier & King, 1985). The community of learners movement was the first "to place a high value on teacher growth and to link teacher and student learning" (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002, p. 22). There was also a stronger focus on improved student learning as a result of the adoption of various organizational models from the private sector (Drucker, 1992; Senge, 1990). This encouraged activities viewed as crucial to the building of a strong professional learning community such as visioning, identity generation, collaboration, cooperative learning, alignment of organizational elements, distribution of power and leadership, and the continual renewal of the school as a learning organization (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner in Murphy, 1990). In support, Louis's (1995) work on the professional community draws attention to the possibility of developing a sense of cohesion in a school, and the importance of that in establishing an educational environment conducive to learning:

> [her] work shows schools that change norms by providing for differentiated roles for teachers, including teachers learning from each other and playing both lead and secondary roles in the classroom. (Walker in Lambert et al., 2002, p. 23)

In the community of learners approach, both the school and the broader community are involved in envisioning a joint future, setting benchmarks for determining whether or not these shared values are being met (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). At the forefront of this approach is the need to see schools as "communities-of-practice" and the necessity for leaders with the capabilities of creating strong relationships with the community.

Barth (1988) introduced the notion of community of learners to the educational leadership literature. He argued that students, teachers and principals are leaders and learners, and that they do this in community. Community of leaders approaches emphasize participation, interaction and collective growth (Palmer, 1998). The focus is on a leadership process that is shared by all (Barth, 1988; Glickman, 1993; Leithwood, 1992; Schlechty, 1990).

Extending the Conceptualization of School Leadership

In the past, research on school leadership has mainly focused on the principal's role (Heck & Hallinger,1999). This resulted from a perceived connection between formal administrative roles and leadership, which centrally positioned the principal as senior manager of the school (Bossert et al.,1982; Boyan, 1988).

Heck & Hallinger (1999) began with a set of earlier studies they had used for an earlier review of the principal's role in school effectiveness and supplemented it with additional empirical reports selected specifically to illustrate alternate conceptual and methodological stances. Table 2:1, excerpted from Heck and Hallinger (1999, p. 141), illustrates the way in which they locate selected studies according to their broad conceptualization of knowledge, philosophical frame, research orientation, leadership model, and method:

Table 2:1

Next Generation Methods for the Study of Leadership and School Improvement

Framework of Approaches for Studying School Leadership
(as adapted from Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 141)

Knowledge	**Positivist**		**Interpretive**		**Critical-Contextual**			
Lens	Structural-functional (Rational)		Political-Conflict	Constructivist	Critical-Constructivist	Feminist	Gender Culture	(No Lens) Postmodern Post-Structural Pragmatic
Research Orientation	Nature of the Work	Administrator Effects	Sense-making in Schools		Sense-making About Social Constructions (Whose interests are served?)			
Example Studies	Peterson (1978) Kmetz & Willower (1981) Martin & Willower (1982) Chung & Miskei (1989)	Scott & Teddie (1887) Eberts & Stone (1988) Hallinger *et al.* (1989) Bamburg & Andrews (1990) Snyder & Ebmeier (1992) Brewer (1993) Hannaway & Talbert (1993) Bass & Avolio 1989) Leithwood (1994) Silins (1994)	Gronn (1984a) Ball (1987) Greenfield 1991) Blasé (1993)	Varenne (1978, 1983) Wolcott (1973) Leithwood & Stager (1989) Ogawa (1991) Duke & Iwanicki (1992) Hart (1994) Murphy & Beck (1995) Anderson & Shirley (1995) Cooper & Heck (1995) Begley (1996) Walker *et al.* (1996) Lum (1997)	Lomotey (1989, 1993) Anderson (1991) Keith (1996)	Regan (1990) Chase (1992) Ortiz (1992) Dillard (1995) Benham (1997) Benham & Cooper (1998)		Blount (1993) Bloom & Munro (1995) Gronn & Ribbins (1996) Robinson (1996)
Leadership	None	Instructional Transformational	Micropolitics	Symbolic, Metaphorical Values-oriented Social Cognition	Moral-Educative (Social Responsibility)		Nontraditonal Interim Informal	

In Table 2:1 Heck and Hallinger have arranged frameworks of school leadership according to perspective or knowledge, lens for exploring knowledge, research orientation, orientation toward leadership and research methods that are compatible with particular approaches to school leadership. With respect to knowledge they include three paradigmatic orientations toward knowledge: Positivist, Interpretive and Critical Contextual. Heck and Hallinger identify the "Structural–Functional" lens as fitting with the Positivist paradigm, the "Political Conflict – Constructivist" lens as fitting with the

Interpretive paradigm, and the "Critical Constructivist," "Feminist" and "Gender Culture" lenses as fitting with the "Critical-Contextual" paradigm. The table then identifies research orientations, approaches to understanding leadership and methods that align with the paradigms and lenses for exploring the paradigms.

While there are some differences there is considerable overlap in what Heck and Hallinger and Lambert write about the historical context of leadership theories. Both see theories of leadership as having evolved from "Behavioral/Rational" to "Constructivist", with Bass and Hallinger noting the progress to "Critical" perspectives. Both Heck and Hallinger, and Lambert move from positive perspectives. Lambert's "Traditional/Behavioral" and "Contingency/Situational" and "Instructional Leadership" perspectives could be placed in Heck and Hallinger's framework of "Positivist" approaches. Lambert's "Community of Leaders" and "Constructivist Leading" perspectives straightforwardly fit with the orientations Heck and Hallinger classify as "Interpretive."

The information in Table 2:1 illustrates the range of perspectives and corresponding methods of investigation scholars have used and are using to study school leadership. Although Heck and Hallinger noted that the information in the table is not all-inclusive it does serve to illustrate and outline the context for new generation approaches to school leadership.

Heck and Hallinger, (1999) specifically discussed constructivist perspectives on leadership, noting a strong connection to the political conflict perspective on leadership. Griffiths (1988), along with other scholars, acknowledged that studies from a political conflict perspective provide a different view on how leaders work in schools (Blasé, 1989, 1993, Greenfield, 1991; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). Researchers adopting this perspective:

> begin with the assumption that schools are characterized by multiple goals, diverse instructional strategies, and relatively high degrees of teacher autonomy. They then proceed to examine how leaders function under such conditions. They view power relations between teachers and administrators as complex and multidirectional. (Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 146)

In focusing on political processes within schools, over time many researchers have moved away from a positivist view of knowledge toward an interpretive approach (Blasé, 1993; & Greenfield, 1991). Heck and Hallinger, (1999, p. 146) stated:

> Anthropologists and sociologists have maintained a long-standing focus on methods of capturing the interpretive, subjective aspects of life. This has often involved describing how participants construct knowledge used within particular social settings (Everhart, 1988; Grant & Fine, 1992; Wolcott, 1992). The constructivist, or sense-making, research orientation examines how leaders and others in the organization create shared understandings about their role and participation in school (Duke, 1986; Everhart, 1988; Slater, 1995). From this viewpoint, leaders help others create meaning and make sense of their work (Blasé, 1993; Duke & Iwanicki, 1992; Everhart, 1988' Firestone, 1990; Gilmore & Murphy, 1991; Greenfield,

> 1991; Lambert et al., 1995; Lotto & Murphy, 1990; Lum, 1997; Ogawa, 1991; Pitner, 1986).

Together Lambert et al.'s work and Heck and Hallinger's work serve to outline the historical and theoretical context for theories of constructivist leadership, which underpins this study. In the next section I explore the theory of constructivist leadership.

Constructivist Approach to Leadership

> It is a cardinal precept of the newer school of education that the beginning of instruction shall be made with the experience learners already have.
>
> John Dewey
> Experience and Education (1938, p. 4)

Constructivism was established as a theory of learning and a theory of knowing before it was viewed as a theory of leadership. John Dewey was a significant early voice in suggesting that individuals learn by using their prior knowledge and experiences to shape meaning and to construct new knowledge. Dewey also promoted the ideal that the school's major function is the preparation of children for democratic citizenship (Glickman, 1998).

Lambert et al. (1995/2002) proposed a theory in educational leadership based on principles of constructivism. They acknowledge that their work on constructivist leadership is based in the theories of Dewey, Bruner, Piaget and Vygotsky. They summarize the contributions of these scholars as follows:

> 1.) "Piaget's theory of 'knowing' and of 'coming to know'" is foundational to constructivism (Fosnot, 1992, p. 167). The premise of his theory was that schemas are constantly under construction and therefore new cognitive structures evolve as an individual encounters new experiences and seeks to assimilate this new information into existing cognitive structures (Piaget & Inhelder, 1971, p.140, in Duffy & Jonassen, 1992).
>
> 2.) Bruner (Bruner & Haste, 1987) and Vygotsky (1978) similarly believed in framing current understandings of experiences as the process of "coming to know." Bruner (1966) takes this further by describing the role of language and prior experience in creating mutual representations for interpretation.
>
> 3.) Vygotsky (1978) surrounds the concept of "coming to know" by providing a mediatory zone for which meaning becomes shared in the "zone of proximal development." (Lambert et al., 2002, pp. 29-30)

Lambert et al. (2002, p.10) also argued that these theoretical influences will only get stronger as we progress through the twentieth century and these theories converge with "new understandings of intelligence, the brain and the impact of culture on student achievement to form constructivist learning."

Early Studies of Constructive Leadership

According to Heck and Hallinger (1999), the ethnographic case study, *Man in the Principal's Office* by Wolcott (1973), was the first to reflect a constructivist approach to school leadership. Wolcott provided a thick, rich description of the full context in which the principal worked. According to Heck and Hallinger (1999, p.146), Wolcott's work revealed, "how the culture or context shapes leadership." They go on to note that "despite the promise of his work, few have followed up to apply this method to leadership in school improvement."

Heck and Hallinger (1999, p. 147) also noted that Gronn (1984a) and Varenne (1978, 1983) contributed early work on constructivist leadership:

> Gronn's (1984a) research documented how administrative communication shaped the nature of a leader's work. Similarly, Varenne (1978, 1983) looked at the use of language in guiding social reality within the school. This involved analyzing the texts of conversations and memos between a principal and teachers.

They went on to cite Everhart (1988) to clarify that:

> these early ethnographic studies often used the interpretive frame with respect to how the researcher made sense out of the participants' actions, rather than how the participants themselves made sense of the actions. (Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 147.)

Such work, they observed, laid a foundation for constructivist approaches to studying leadership.

Goal of Constructivist Leadership

According to Lambert et al. (2002, p. viii), from a constructivist perspective, leadership is conceived as "the reciprocal process that enables participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling." In many ways, the constructivist approach is more about what it is not, than what it is. Not all learning processes constitute leadership. Lambert (2000) stated: "To be 'leadership,' these processes must enable participants to learn themselves toward a shared sense of purpose – a purpose made real by the collaboration of committed adults" (p. 2). Leadership is not a trait theory in that "leadership" and "leader" are not the same. Leadership is not about a set of behaviors expressed by one person. From a constructivist perspective, leadership exists in the connections or learning processes that unfold within the context of relationships in a school community. The key is to understand that leadership exists in the processes of learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. Such processes provide:

> opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings. (Lambert Leadership Development: handout, Nov. 6, 2000, p. 2)

Leadership as a Reciprocal Process

Leadership is about learning. Key reciprocal learning processes that engage a school community in the work of leadership enable the community to renew itself. Lambert (1998) asserted:

> A basic human learning need is to frame our work and our lives with big questions: How can I reach my students better? What really works? How will I define myself as a teacher, father, and community member? A commitment to a culture of inquiry responds to this need by providing a forum in which we can surface and describe our most compelling questions. Therefore, it is important to develop a culture that is inquiry based. This culture is often not the norm in schools where teaching and learning have become technical and routine processes. When we pose questions of relevance, we reenergize ourselves and focus our work together. (p. 81)

These reciprocal processes enable us to engage in making meaning occur within the context of relationships. A culture based on reciprocal learning is clearly not compatible with the traditional perspective of principal as leader with others as followers. Lambert et al. (2002) suggested "we need to stop thinking of roles or people as fixed entities and instead view them as relationships [and] as patterns of relationships that involve one another" (p. 44). Lambert (1998) noted that the reciprocal processes of leadership are reflection, inquiry, dialogue and action. She also argued that it is essential that these attributes along with equity, "a profound respect for the worthiness of each other," be integrated into the daily communication patterns within the school community (Lambert, 1998; Lambert et al., 2002, p. 44). The factor that may most clearly distinguish constructivist leadership from other theories relates to the professional growth of staff members. Szabo and Lambert

(Lambert et al., 2002) specifically address the preparation and potential of all members of the school community as constructivist leaders. They listed the following as foundational principles for all who participate in constructivist leadership:

> 1.) Learning is active rather than a passive process.
> 2.) Learning is by nature social and is most likely to occur when learners share ideas, inquire, and problem solve together.
> 3.) Learners, to go beyond rote learning, must have opportunities to make sense of new knowledge and create meaning for themselves based on individual and shared experiences.
> 4.) Reflection and metacognition contribute to the construction of knowledge and the process of sense-making.
> 5.) New learning is mediated by prior experience, values, and beliefs. (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 205)

In practice, these principles provide a challenge to existing views of leadership and hope for change. A school that restructures itself to function as a constructivist learning community will look and act differently from a traditional school.

Broadening Concepts of Constructivist Leadership

Leadership as Cultivation, Constructivist Episodes and Rescripting

Robert J. Starratt (2000) in his paper "Democratic Leadership Theory in Late Modernity: An Oxymoron or Ironic Possibility," explored whether or not a theory of democratic leadership is really possible. As the paper progresses it becomes apparent that what he refers to as democratic leadership is arguably an enactment of constructivist leadership.

As Starratt (2000) explored various premises for democratic leadership he discussed an interesting framework for leadership, which is that of cultivation (p. 12). He emphasized that: "democratic leadership is primarily concerned to cultivate an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas, and the virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility, and compassion" (p.12). These concepts of democratic leadership are based on the writings of Dewey. Within this framework teachers are seen as cultivators and not rational/technical bureaucrats. Leadership is:

> cultivating school environments where ... fuller humanity is experienced and activated by people acting in communion, by people with many different talents, backgrounds interests and abilities bringing these together in a common public work, namely a rich quality of learning by all members. Moreover, the concept of cultivation may be considered central to the learning process itself. (Starratt, 2000, p. 12)

This environment of cultivation bears similarity to the reciprocal learning process that Lambert (1998) wrote about. Starratt (2000) also discussed the impact of constructivism on teaching and learning. He implied that leadership is a series of ongoing constructivist episodes that take place during one's life journey. Starratt (2000) suggested that constructivist theory proposes a two dimensional dynamic:

> The historical and cultural context plays a crucial role in constructing individuals; the individual, in turn, through the various experiences and encounters with his or her world, responds, makes choices, seeks goals, pursues interests, uses developing talents. Thus in tacit as well as intentional ways the individual constructs him or her self, using the cultural meanings language, and symbolic interpretive and expressive systems. . . Thus in healthy humans we find a continuous cycle of the construction of knowledge, the self, the other, the world; the deconstruction of knowledge, the self, the other, the world; the reconstruction of knowledge, the self, the other, the world. (p.18)

The significance of constructivist theory is, then, that "since the script is a human construction, it is possible for a group of human beings to rewrite the script" (Starratt, 2002, p. 19). In the same way we can rewrite the script for schooling and broaden the sense of shared purpose and shared understanding:

> In other words, the work of rescripting the work of schooling will necessarily be more evolutionary than a revolutionary process, not only because a revolution is politically impossible, but also because those doing the rescripting are working within the very cultural perspectives they want to challenge. . . The work will involve struggle, time and patient and respectful conversation among many people. . .The reconstruction of schooling involves both a deconstruction of meanings, values, and assumptions – the analysis of their negatives and their positives, of what is to be rejected and what kept – and a reconstruction, an invention of new meanings, new metaphors, new organizational dynamics, new institutional processes which will carry the playing of school into a more humanly satisfying and morally fulfilling story. (Starratt, 2002, p. 20)

The work of constructivist leadership includes deconstructing the presently accepted script, with an awareness that each of us as humans will believe that our answer is the right answer for everyone when in fact there is no one right answer (p. 20). The premise here is that what we know sometimes prevents us from seeing other aspects of reality and that new knowledge can blind us from the recognition that "the what" we do not know is always much larger that what we know (p. 21). It follows that the constructivist process:

> must retain the ironist attitude that the rescripting will contain distortions, omissions, latent power relationships. The rescripting will more than likely lead to unforeseen future problems even while it addresses current problems. Further, rescripting schooling for others without their participation in the conversation will almost certainly make matters worse. (Starratt, 2002, p. 21)

In practice Starratt (2002) was suggesting that we take a sensible approach to addressing the transformation of schooling. We must always be on the lookout for self-serving or domineering motives within the process that deter us from building leadership capacity within the school. There must be openness to opposing views with a focus on the common good for all. This will help establish a kind of "balance" and an insurance that we don't allow knowledge to lead us to the illusion of control over what one knows, because it can actually lead to the exclusion and silencing of all other points of view.

This chapter began with an overview of the "Evolution of Educational Theories of Learning and Leading," calling on the work of Lambert et al. (1995, 2002) and Heck and Hallinger (1999). This led to a discussion of the "Constructivist Approach to Leadership" as laid out by Lambert et al. (2002), which is the major influence for the conceptual framework of this study. In concluding I reflected on "Broadening the Concepts of Constructivist Leadership," based on the work of Starratt (2000). Starratt (2000) argues that we be on the lookout for "self-serving or domineering motives" that deter us from building leadership capacity within a school. He also shed light on the possibility that the reciprocal learning process allows for a "rescripting of schools," emphasizing that the work of constructivist leadership also includes "deconstructing the presently accepted script" for seeing other aspects of reality. In doing so, the intention is to broaden the sense of shared purpose and shared understanding to include new and deeper levels of shared meaning.

Chapter Three:
Methods

> According to Lincoln and Guba, *constructivism* adopts a relativist ontology (relativism), a transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology. Users of this paradigm are oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world. The traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by such terms as trustworthiness and authenticity. Constructivists value transactional knowledge.
>
> Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 158

This chapter is organized under the headings, "Constructivist Approach – Interpretive Research, Method, Rigor of Research, Limitations and Delimitations."

Constructivist Approach – Interpretive Research

In research the interpretive approaches allow the researcher to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). The actual design of the interpretive research project is an important part of the process in determining the methods to be used. More specifically:

> Interpretive case studies . . . contain rich, thick description. These interpretive data are used to develop conceptual

> categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. . . A case study researcher gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon. (Merriam, 1988, p. 27)

Further, Denzin and Lincoln explain that, at the most general level, there are four major interpretive paradigms: the positivist/postpositivist, the constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory) and the feminist poststructural (p. 19). My perspective on leadership has been shaped and reshaped by my experiences as a researcher, administrator, teacher, minister, colleague, student, parent and citizen. It is through these experiences, as discussed in chapter 1, that I began to see my leadership experiences through the lens of constructivism. Likewise, constructivism in the world of research assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The interpretive case study method chosen aligns well with a study of the constructivist approach to leadership. For the purpose of this study the terms constructivist, interpretive and naturalistic when used to describe research at a paradigmatic level, are used synonymously. The term "qualitative" is used to refer to methods; eg., observations and interviews.

Through I have written using the interpretive approach, as a researcher my approach was to engage the reader in a type of dialectical/hermeneutical interchange. The intent was to create a text that will serve to engage readers in a process of reconstruction of the phenomenon as represented in the study, in the context of the readers' own experiences. Stake (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 442) suggests that such new understandings of the phenomenon may lead to even more sophisticated and informed constructions of the phenomenon. My goal has been to create a text which will contribute to readers constructing and reconstructing their knowledge of school leadership:

> In life itself, this occurs seldom to the individual alone but in the presence of others. In a social process, together they bend, spin, consolidate, and enrich their understandings. We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience. The case researcher emerges from one social experience, the observation, to choreograph another, the report. Knowledge is socially constructed, so we constructivists believe, and in their experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge. (Stake in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 442).

Method

Site of Inquiry

The constructivist position holds that the socially situated researcher creates relationships for interaction and a reality for the collection of empirical materials for data analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) assert that in research sites, interpretive practices are used and implemented for theoretical interpretations of the world.

This study was conducted at one school setting. Stoney Creek School has two separate programs that operate in dedicated spaces in the same building. Stoney Creek School was selected for its reputation as a school that encourages reciprocal learning as a tool for constructing meaning. The principal, staff and students have brought reputed success to the school and community.

Data Gathering

I gathered data over a two-month period during which I immersed myself in the school community four and one half days per week. I also attended two staff meetings, three administration meetings and two school/community special functions.

I used two general approaches to data gathering. The first approach was somewhat informal. Data was gathered from observations of staff, administration and students in informal situations and meetings. Field notes were also taken to record observations of daily activities within the school. These observations included routine and non-routine day-to-day occurrences. During the observations, data was also collected through unstructured interviews or informal conversations that occurred. I made daily entries in a research journal to complement my field notes. The formal data gathering activities included a collection of all relevant documents and two sets of semi-structured interviews. Relevant documents included: government documents, school district and school documents such as promotional materials, media reports, policy handbooks, minutes from meetings, school announcements, and newsletters.

The formal part of data gathering took place through a process of two sets of interviews. The two sets of semi-structured interviews were conducted over a two-month period at the site. Merriam (1998) affirms that:

> In qualitative case studies, interviewing is a major source of qualitative data needed for understanding the phenomenon under study. . . . Most common is the semi-structured interview that is guided by a set of questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is predetermined. The success of the interview depends on the interaction between interviewer and respondent. (p. 86)

Therefore, the interviews were not guided by a list of prescriptive questions. Through the use of focused conversation, dialogue became emergent and I let the participant take the lead (see Appendix A for interview guides). The principal and all staff members were invited to participate. The principal was asked to identify four potential student and four potential parent participants whom she believed were knowledgeable about the school. Other participants were selected using the snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 70). I asked each participant selected in the initial group to recommend another potential participant who they considered to be knowledgeable about the school, and who could provide a unique perspective. All teachers were given the opportunity to participate in the study. Twelve out of twenty teachers chose to participate. Teacher participants ranged in teaching experience from first year to twenty years of service. Student participants for individual interviews were from grades five, six, seven and nine. It was recommended by the students from the individual interviews that I also meet with a group of junior high girls who already met weekly to discuss and plan leadership for the school. Students participating in this Fishco Group that I interviewed were from grades seven, eight and nine. Each participant and the Fishco Group were interviewed two times during the two-month period.

The interview guide for the second set of interviews was developed based upon early analysis of data from the first set of interviews and from the observations. In preparation for the second interview, each respondent was provided with a transcription of the first interview to serve as a member check. They were also asked to review the transcript with a view to identifying areas to pursue in the second interview. At this time I also invited them to contact me via email or in person while I was at the school with areas or thoughts that they wanted to pursue. The guide for the second interview was constructed through such interaction between participants and researcher. After the transcription from the second interview was returned to the participant, she/he was invited to contact the researcher with questions for further discussion.

Data Analysis

Data from interview transcripts, observational field notes and documents were analyzed during and after the data collection stage. I also used a research journal for documenting my early thoughts while collecting data. Textual content analysis drawing on conventional hermeneutical techniques as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.193) were employed. Data was initially coded in categories based on the seven specific research questions. As data analysis proceeded it was necessary to construct new coding categories:

> Coding helps us to gain a new perspective on our material and to focus further data collection, and may lead us in unforeseen directions. . . Coding starts the chain of theory development. Codes that account for our data take form together as nascent theory that, in turn, explains these data and directs further data gathering. (Charmaz in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 515)

Data analysis was an ongoing process where various constructions were interpreted, compared and contrasted using hermeneutical techniques (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

Data analysis was facilitated through a colleague who acted as a "critical friend."[3] This person was engaged in discussions of the data and helped me evaluate decisions I was making about the data. This not only served purpose as related to the audit, but also contributed to the decision making process in data analysis. Interpretation of the data was also checked with the principal at each stage of the process and in the final writing of this dissertation.

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[3] A critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. He or she observes, joins in the research process, provides feedback and data, and questions and probes. (Costa & Kallick, 1994, p. 50)

Rigor of Research – Trustworthiness

In addressing the question of rigor in qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 5) cite Flick (1998, p. 230) to make the point that:

> The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation. The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 21) identify credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as criteria for trustworthiness.

Credibility

The measure of confidence, believability or truth-value, of the study's findings is fundamental to the overall value of the qualitative research undertaken. Triangulation was provided through the use of multiple methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake 1995). Therefore the following two strategies were employed for enhancing credibility:

1) In order to provide credibility it was necessary for me as researcher to provide methodological triangulation, data source triangulation, and theory triangulation (Stake, 1995,

pp. 111-114). This was provided through using multiple sources, a variety of data collection strategies, and by incorporating a diversity of perspectives and participants, by collecting data over a two-month period, and by consulting with the Stoney Creek principal, my supervisor and committee during the data analysis and writing of the final report for this case study. The data analysis was facilitated through a colleague who acted as a "critical friend."

2) Member checks were the second strategy for enhancing credibility. After the first interview the transcription time period was one month. After the second interview the transcription time period was two months. Transcripts were then returned to participants for editing and approval before being analyzed as data. The data analysis process took four months. Member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) were also conducted throughout the process while themes were being constructed from the data analysis and during the final writing of the report. The final report took four months to write. The Stoney Creek principal and "critical friend" were consulted during the writing of the report.

Transferability

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe transferability in naturalistic inquiry as the degree to which specific research findings can be extrapolated to other situations and settings. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) further contend that in dealing with people it is difficult to generalize findings because personal perceptions are assumed subjective and context dependent. Stake and Merriam provide further insights into transferability, suggesting that findings from a case study are different than those from other kinds of research because they are more concrete and portray a personal application of the reader's own experience, because they are contextually based, more fully developed by the reader's interpretation and based more on reference populations as determined by the reader's personal reality (Stake, 1995, pp. 35-36, & Merriam, 1988, pp. 14-15). Therefore, I have included a full and clear description of the context in which this case study of leadership was conducted (Stake 1995, p. 102). Stake, in addressing the issue of validity in qualitative case study research concluded that by:

> acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen. (Stake, 1995, p. 444)

Dependability and Confirmability

Stake (1995) asserts that research design in naturalistic inquiry is anticipated to be emergent (p. 21 & 44). Therefore, I used an "inquiry audit" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) as a technique to establish dependability and confirmability. An audit was conducted as part of this study, and records of activities, decisions, inquiries and concerns, which occurred during all phases of the research study, were kept in order to support the audit. Dialogue with a "critical friend" and the school principal about observations and impressions of informal and formal conversations served as an audit. During the data collection and analysis stages of the study, I met regularly with my supervisor to review decisions made and questions that arose. My research journal along with a record of these meetings serves as an audit trail. The "audit trail" also allows for the on-going and final audit of my research study and will be the major technique for enhancing confirmability.

Delimitations and Limitations

1) The study was delimited to a focus on constructivist leadership in one school.
2) For practical reasons, the study of the leadership experience was delimited to the perspectives of selected members of the school.
3) The proposed method and procedure for identifying and selecting respondents knowledgeable about each school served as a limitation of the study.
4) Ethical situations that arose required the exclusion of certain data and contributed to another limitation of the study.
5) Given that data was collected over the period of two months spent in the school, the description of the leadership phenomena will be within the context of that historical moment. This is a limiting factor with respect to transferability of findings.
6) Much of constructivist leadership is about relationships. With the recent teacher/board conflicts in schools, relationships were somewhat strained. This served as a limitation of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Explaining purpose and nature of research to participants:

Teachers, parents or guardians and students received a written explanation of the proposed research (see appendices c – h). In addition, I discussed orally the purpose and nature of the study with teacher and student participants. Parents were given opportunity to contact me at any time with any questions or concerns that they may have had about the research project or about their child's involvement.

Obtaining informed consent of participants:

The informed consent of teachers, student participants and their parents or guardians was obtained by consent forms (see appendices c – h): one for teachers, one for each of the four student participants and one for their parents or guardians, requesting their support. In the case of the four underage student participants, parents were contacted and consent was obtained prior to meeting with each student.

Circumstances that could compromise the voluntary consent of participants:

The only person that would seem at face value to have been in a captive situation would be the principal. But just as the initial proposal of the research project was welcomed whole heartedly by her, so was the rest of the research experience. She saw this as an opportunity to learn more about her leadership style and to help her teaching staff can become even more effective through the information gained from this study. She saw this as an opportunity to share her wonderful story of what has happened at Stoney Creek School.

Providing for exercising right to opt out:

Before beginning the interviews, I met with each participant in order to explain the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed for the interviews, and the ethical guidelines (i.e. provisions for ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to opt out). The consent forms outlined the purpose of the research and the proposed benefits, as well as the right of the participant to withdraw at any time without penalty. See the attached forms in the Appendix.

Addressing anonymity and confidentiality issues:

Teachers, student participants and their parents or guardians were informed that any information that was provided would be kept confidential according to their expressed wishes. Legal names of participants are not included in the research paper or in any write-up or discussion of the research. Pseudo-names have been used.

Avoiding threat or harm:

As a researcher who cares deeply about the well being of individuals, it was my responsibility to ensure the creation of a safe and respectful environment to allow for the free discussion and disclosure of opinions and feelings when engaging in topics of a sensitive nature. Therefore:

- A formal meeting with the principal was arranged in order to explain the nature of the study. During this meeting guidelines were put in place to guarantee all possible measures would be taken to ensure that the participants understand the purpose of the study and the nature of their individual involvement.
- A copy of the Ethics Review Form, the research proposal, and an outline of the Freedom of Information Policy was provided to insure confidentiality of all participants' responses.
- In writing, participants were informed that all involvement is voluntary. It was made known that they could opt out of the study at any time, they could decline to answer questions when they felt necessary, and they would be given the opportunity to make appropriate changes to the research that they felt was warranted without penalty, harm or loss of promised benefit. Where students were involved, written parental consent was obtained before any involvement.
- Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' actual names.

  Regular meetings with the advisor took place to discuss the progress of the study, and to deal with any ethical issues that arose.

Provision of security of data:

The collected data and its analysis will not be used in any verbal or written form beyond the stated confines and purpose of the study. In order to safeguard participants and others from threat or harm of repercussions of the study:

- All data was kept in confidence and stored in a locked filing cabinet.
- All data used for the research project will be destroyed after the final oral defense of the dissertation.
- The data will not be used beyond the confines of the study.
- All information stored in my computer was only accessed by my research assistant or myself.

Involvement of research assistants or transcribers:

These individuals signed a confidentiality agreement before being given their position.

Chapter Four:
Context

The following description of the school was written following document analysis and is grounded in the perceptions and accounts of the participants. Even so, as my supervisor pointed out, at times this description may sound like a "promotional brochure" that the school or district might have created in order to attract potential students. While trying to interpret the essence of Stoney Creek School I realized that from its beginning Stoney Creek has been used as an icon for the school district. Today the school still does weekly tours for out of district visitors, community visitors and parents. Teachers and students are trained to give tours and present the quality features of their school. The school has been featured in various educational reviews. This promotional dialogue is very evident in the culture of the school and thus permeates the flavor of this chapter.

School Location

Stoney Creek School is located in the heart of a large urban city center. Its central location allows for easy access for anyone choosing to attend the school. Public transportation provides access to the school from all outlying communities around the city proper. Many parents drive their children from a distance to school themselves or belong to a car pool. The school is situated in an older area that has been redeveloped. Initially it was thought that this redevelopment would cause Stoney Creek School to close its doors as the surrounding apartments and condominiums had been refurbished with the purpose of serving an adult community.

History

Stoney Creek School opened its doors for the first time on March 13, 1911 to 280 elementary and junior high pupils. The average class size on this day of opening was 35 pupils per room. The school featured innovations such as indoor toilets, electric lights, and a miniature rifle range that made it one of Canada's most modern schools. The six first floor classrooms were built to accommodate 50 pupils and each had its own cloakroom separated from the teaching area by swinging doors. The second floor also had six classrooms as well as a library and teachers' room. Since 1911, the school has undergone many alterations and additions with the west annex being built in 1928 and the gymnasium being constructed in 1957. The school's mascot, the infamous "Moose Head," originally presented to the school in 1918, has been reconditioned and once again overlooks the main hallway. A staff member who has been at Stoney Creek School for twenty-one years reflects on her feelings about Stoney Creek School:

> I think it's just a very special place and always has been. As you walk into the building and you come across the steps, it makes me get a tear in my eye. There is a curve in the cement on the steps. Do you have any idea how many kids, teachers, staff and important people have

> walked this same route and now we each have the honor of walking across those same steps every morning.

In spite of the many changes over the years, the genial feelings engendered in the school's classrooms and hallways don't seem to have changed. The school's yearly enrollment has varied over the years, peaking in the 1950's at over 700 students and reaching as low as 130 in the early 1980's. Throughout the years the school served elementary and junior high students until the junior high was phased out in 1979 due to declining enrollment in this division.

In a landmark decision on April 25, 1995, the Board of Trustees for a large Western Canadian school system approved the establishment of an alternative junior high school program for girls at Stoney Creek School beginning in the 1995-96 school year. Twenty five years after the closure of the initial junior high, the Junior High Program for Young Women was implemented, allowing for a new focus in which elementary and junior high programs complement one another and help to establish new traditions and ways of servicing the community. The elementary program houses 220 students from kindergarten to grade 6 and 210 girls are registered at the junior high level.

Stoney Creek School holds onto its tradition of serving the very diverse cultural population of the surrounding area and yet, at the same time, embraces change and innovation by offering unique programming strategies to increase student achievement and engagement. Students come from all over the city and surrounding areas to participate in Canada's first *MicroSociety* school for elementary students and the alternative junior high program for young women. Together the two programs, which are described below, represent a wide range of opportunities, choices and voices for the purpose of helping teachers transform students into active participants and making education exciting and relevant for all students. The objective of the school is to ensure that students learn by leading and doing. Students at Stoney Creek School 'play' with the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned through the provincially mandated curriculum as they bridge classroom learning with the outside world. The six pillars of character education - caring, citizenship, trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility and respect - are used as the foundation of decision making. During casual conversations with students it is apparent that they know the answers to questions such as "Why am I learning this?" and "How do I fit into this world?"

Stoney Creek Elementary School Program

The Stoney Creek Elementary Vision for Schooling was created by parents and staff members in 1997 and continues to be revisited annually. Key beliefs expressed in the vision are:

- A strong foundation in all subject areas

- Life long learning attitudes
- Critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Thinking out of the box
- Disciplined work habits
- Knowledge of strengths and areas for growth
- Confidence and high self-esteem
- Willingness to accept success and risk failure
- Independent and collaborative skills
- Respect for self, others, the school, and broader community
- Successful, responsible citizenship

Stoney Creek Elementary program's *MicroSociety* has been in existence for four years. In this program students explore careers, apply academic skills in real-life problem solving situations, and develop social skills necessary in everyday life. The *MicroSociety* program encourages students from kindergarten to grade six to learn to work cooperatively with others and learn the importance of teamwork within a democratic framework. Students and staff are sworn in as Micro citizens, government officials are elected and appointed, and business and community members spend time preparing students for their "*MicroSociety* world of work" by offering academics in business basics, banking, government, marketing, advertising, post office and customer service. Students establish businesses and engage in market research to design goods and services that will meet the needs of their consumers. Prevalent is the belief that *MicroSociety* helps students develop an early and accurate sense of the world they live in.

Junior High Program for Young Women

The Junior High Program for Young Women is an "alternative program of choice" for junior high girls within the public school system. The goal for the young women attending this program is to become successful, healthy contributing members of society, able to demonstrate the "Young Women's" Standard for Student Success. The standards that guide all learning activities are:

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

- Communication skills
- Thinking skills
- Life long learning

INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE

- High expectations for self confidence and creativity
- Healthy and active living
- Aesthetic and cultural appreciation

TEAMWORK

- Responsible citizenship
- Leadership
- Service to others

Junior high students are given opportunity to participate in the Curriculum, Enrichment, Extension and Days program (C.E.E.D.S.). This program encourages teams of girls to work together for the common good of the school and society in eight cross-graded teams. Students can be seen organizing and facilitating events such as: the annual science fair, service learning projects, fund raising to send Malawian girls to school, the design and construction of a secret garden, the establishment of a fitness studio, student crime stoppers, a math fair, the annual celebration of International Women's day, and exploratory conferences. Students work together on classroom projects that encourage learning about government, law, business, communications, education, arts, athletics, public service and other fields. While working on these activities there is a clear focus on student leadership, independent judgment and self-direction.

In addition to *MicroSociety* and C.E.E.D.S., teachers aim to use a variety of instructional strategies with an emphasis on the use of graphic organizers, questioning strategies and cooperative learning integrated across the curriculum to promote higher order thinking. Key strategies used for the improvement of instruction are:

- Professional development focused on specific individual needs of staff.
- Participation in modeling and coaching.
- Ongoing analysis of student achievement.
- Participation in action-based research.
- Consensus decision making centered on meeting student needs.
- Staff meetings focused on professional development and improvement of programming.
- Use of district consultants.
- Ongoing dialogue among students, parents and teachers related to student growth and school decision making.
- Networking with other international schools.
- Character education.
- High expectations for all stakeholders.

- A belief that everything written at Stoney Creek is always in "draft" form, symbolizing a commitment to improvement over time and the quest for excellence in teaching and learning.

The goal for all teachers at Stoney Creek School is to be facilitators of learning for the purpose of empowering students to actively participate in their learning in preparation for life's challenges.

Student Atmosphere

Students come to Stoney Creek School from many different parts of the city including many outlying areas. Just as students' living locations vary so does their personal background and social status. As Suzzane, a Stoney Creek student, so aptly put it, "if we all went to different schools probably none of us would be friends. We're all so different!" Another junior high student, Julia, confirms these thoughts as she states:

> As a result of some of the friendships here, sometimes you also learn to accept the fact that they are more privileged than you and there's nothing you can do about it and you can still be friends you know. Especially in the junior high women's program, it is its own community, no one else understands. The girls also get along well with the elementary kids. When you walk in the hall there's elementary kids always in our wing, they stop and ask us for help, if we can we help them or we take them to someone that can help them. I think we see ourselves as one big community, but semi-separate like the suburbs kind of, like, there's this boundary – well it's junior high and elementary!

The addition of the women's program has allowed for revitalization and growth of both the elementary and junior high program. It has stimulated interest and established a positive reputation for Stoney Creek School in the city.

Parent Participation

Parent support for student learning initiatives and field trips is strong and attendance at special school functions indicates the same. Daily volunteering of assistance in the classroom is limited in attendance as most families have both parents working out of the home. This coupled with the large number of drive-in families is not conducive to daily volunteering except for those families who live in the area. About five percent of the school families live in the area. As one parent put it:

> I think every parent has the opportunity to get involved. The school is always open to back and forth communication. Parents can get involved in the parent association meetings. We are welcome to come in and work with the children, work with the teachers, help out and I like to take advantage of those things. . . I live about seven minutes away. In fact today I ran home after I worked with a grade six students pre-exam. I get to run home and run back. So I'm very close.
>
> The decision making process at Stoney Creek always involves the parents. There is definitely a process in place. I think it's discussed with all the teachers first and how they feel. I think they take into consideration how decisions will affect the children and then they bring it to the parents. We have our meetings or notices are sent out. There's always input requested from the parents whether they give it or not. . . It always comes back to the parents, for example, whether there would be two assistants, one for the women's program and one for elementary. . . It's nice to feel involved, you're not just shut out and only allowed to drop off your child where she goes in and at the end of the day you hear the problems or the good

> things, but you still don't really feel like you know what went on at school that day.

Overall parent support and participation at Stoney Creek School is strong. The premise of parent ownership has been especially prevalent since the inception and implementation of the Junior High Program for Young Women, which was spearheaded by a group of parents. Many of the elementary program parents have put their girls in Stoney Creek School so that they can attend the young women's program in junior high.

Community Involvement

Community involvement is highly encouraged. The school seeks to find ways to bring in special guest speakers from the community. The school also has a mentoring program where each junior high student is partnered with a volunteer mentor. Many people from the business community take time out of their busy work week to come to Stoney Creek School to meet with a student to hear them read or to discuss a project that they are working on. Mentors get to know their students well and often become involved in their personal lives. On many occasions I have seen a mentor bring a McDonald's lunch to school for the student to eat while they spend time sharing.

Teacher Organization

In Stoney Creek School the staff is primarily made up of women with only one male assistant principal on staff. Staff members do not perceive this as an imbalance, nor do the students interviewed. Some parents noted that it would be nice to have another male teacher at the elementary level. A few years ago a male staff member was hired to teach in the Junior High Program for Young Women and this seemed to workout fine, but the teacher transferred out after one year. Some teachers showed concern that they did not have input into this decision to have a male working in a female program. It should be noted that as this current school year ended the administration hired a male teaching member for the girls program for the next school year. This idea was much more widely accepted this time. However, a couple of teachers still noted the same concerns with a male teaching science and math. An important part of the young women's program is to encourage the girls to take risks where other women have primarily not, especially in the sciences. The concern is this: is this the best modeling for the girls when this is an area that we want them to step forward in and take the lead for society?

Political Climate

Previous to this school year teachers were involved in a long labor dispute in which teachers chose to take strike action last school year. The effects of this hostile dispute continued to be felt during this research project. Political pressure for the school district to balance its budget caused the lay off of all teachers who did not hold a permanent teaching certificate. These teachers were notified at the end of May that they would not be reinstated for the next school year. This event no doubt has affected this research and the tone of relationships within the school. In fact one of the teacher participants who had been the most positive about her participation in the leadership process at Stoney Creek chose to be excused from the study once she found out that she would not be rehired next year by the school district. All transcripts were returned with every line blacked out with felt pen and a note requesting to be removed completely from the study. This is a clear example of the hurt that is felt by extremely committed teachers who have toiled to meet the needs of their students during already difficult times.

Chapter Five:
Leadership Through Change

Prior to her appointment to Stoney Creek, Janice Zorac had been a principal for five years. Her previous staff at Tannony School had become a close-knit group and yet, as principal, Janice felt she had more to learn. A staff member who worked with Janice at Tannony School and at Stoney Creek School saw a remarkable change in the way Janice functioned as a principal. She saw Janice as leading a more balanced life during her principalship at Stoney Creek:

> Previously, at Tannony School, Janice being a very young single principal, she worked eighteen hours a day, everyday; now she doesn't for various reasons such as her health, she can't do it anymore. She didn't value taking care of herself. She didn't value exercising. She was a great person then but I think she is a better person now because she's happier and has a different way of looking at things.

She also commented on Janice's bringing more of a results orientation to her work at Stoney Creek:

> The biggest reason here is because we always start with the end in mind. We always start with: what do we want to achieve? what are our desired results? and that's one of Janice's huge strengths. To be able to pick that out of whatever we're doing and because people are so open and feel free to talk around here, when they know that's what were working towards. They're not afraid to say "well I think we should do it this way" or "I think we should do it that way" and "I think we should try it" and then the next person isn't afraid to say "well yeah I like what you're saying but can we tweak it this way or do

> it that way" and I think that's the biggest difference here at Stoney Creek.
>
> We know what we're working towards and we have players around the table that believe in that, support that and aren't afraid to talk about it and say what they think. You know we didn't have that previously, but now we have moved beyond sugarcoating things.

It was at this time that Janice started to explore new ways of looking at the principalship. In doing so she came to think about, explore and endeavor to practice constructivist views of leadership. As Janice reminisces:

> The experience has been most interesting and challenging, fraught with contradictions and has become a blending of best practices. I guess in many ways that is "constructivist leadership."

In what follows I outline Janice's experiences as a leader as she travels through these contradictions during her principalship at Stoney Creek School. The following analysis is grounded in the constructions and accounts of the participants. Where possible, I have used participants' words and voices to support the interpretations. Janice's leadership story has been organized under the headings: "A Mandate for Change," "Setting the Stage for Change," "First Steps," "The First Staff Meeting," "Consultation with Parents and School District," "A Staff Choice," "Exploring Results for Change," "New Ways of Performing," "Principal's Thinking During the Change Process," and "Principal as Leader."

A Mandate for Change

When Janice Zorac received her assignment to Stoney Creek School from the superintendent of schools she was told that a new vision was needed that would take the school to new heights. Student achievement was down, parents had not totally bought into the Junior High Program for Young Women, and attendance in the elementary program was on the decline.

Janice toured the school during the spring previous to the school year that she would take over. She reflected on her first visit:

> I walked into confusion, an environment that I believed could be much more inviting and focused on student engagement with learning. It was apparent that junior high students showed no regard for adults as I experienced being jostled around in the hallways during my first walkabout. My first thoughts were, Oh my goodness what have I gotten into! It was amazingly disappointing; the physical state of the school was scary. As I toured classrooms in both programs I observed passive learning, the majority of classrooms were in direct instruction mode with junior high students expected to listen, but they were involved in chatting and not engaged in the learning. Behavior issues were apparent. As I met with parents I became aware of their concerns with a women being assigned to Stoney Creek, they were fearful that I was coming in to make the young women's program bigger and ultimately close the elementary program.

Janice believed that as an educational leader and mentor she must intentionally set out to cause change by demonstrating absolute persistence in everything that she did, and in her words "relentlessly dealing with the issues at hand." Her first efforts were focused on monitoring the current policies and procedures, with an emphasis on those related to discipline and classroom practices. She encouraged other administration members, teachers, parent council and young women's program board members to participate in dialogue about the workings and effectiveness of current policies and procedures. As one elementary parent stated at a school meeting:

> Since we've come to this school, I've seen definite strengths. There is a lot of energy, not just in Janice as the principal but every member of staff right down to support staff that have so much energy for what is happening within the school.

Another parent of a junior high school student commented on classroom practice:

> Classroom teaching has become interesting. The working ability of all the teachers, all the support staff together to make it almost a family environment. The collaboration between the different teachers, helping each other in their studies. How the children can go from one teacher right to another in the time frame of a day and be able to just work with that person and each of their abilities accommodated by teachers is amazing.
>
> I have some concerns with the size of classes and the special needs of so many different children. Although I have not seen a child that hasn't been accommodated, I am concerned about the future as a result of our tight budget.

Conversations took place during the course of regular work activities and in meetings where policies and procedures were part of the agenda. Janice encouraged her educational team to look at their core values and beliefs. As one long-time teacher spoke in general terms about this process:

> It is a democratic feminist approach that will fulfill our need for a higher level of forwardness at this school or acceptability of forwardness, higher level of acceptability of critique, analysis and critical constructivism.

Through such conversations staff members, parents and community members looked for meaning in their current policies and their implications for teachers to impact student learning. They also explored how these policies affected teachers' abilities to enact leadership for the purpose of building a shared responsibility for student learning. Janice, a sixth year teacher, asserted:

> I look at the policies as expectations for my personal and professional performance. I think that all teachers are the beginning of leadership as they stand before the class of children. They instantly become a role model for those students. They lead them spiritually for six hours a day; they lead them educationally for six hours a day. Leadership is mentoring and teachers are mentors.

The teachers felt that the working through of these issues was important for ensuring that in the future Stoney Creek expectations remain the same. This would provide a focus for new teachers as they join the staff.

Setting the Stage for Change

While looking at these current policies for the purpose of establishing a basis for change, Janice was cognizant of the need to ensure that conversations didn't end at the policy level but that teachers saw themselves as taking practical steps to enhancing student learning. Janice felt that in order for those on staff to change their mindsets, opportunity for incremental change and daily celebration was necessary. She also recognized it was important for the leadership team to model actions that align with the focus on student achievement. For example an assistant principal said:

> There is a lot of focus on the work. Daily announcements are posted showing all the great things happening each day at Stoney Creek School. We celebrate student and staff successes at monthly assemblies and open houses. You need to model what you expect. We expect teachers to be very focused on student achievement and on our focus initiative and as a result they are.

For example Kayden, a grade five student, proudly talks about an opportunity that she received to display her leadership through presenting at an assembly:

> At last assembly we showed our weather instruments and did a presentation on how we had got put into groups and then we made a weather instrument and a brochure and everything and we presented that. Everyone cheered and clapped for us!

Parents and community members are often present at school functions where students and staff showcase the learning that is taking place. Food is present at many Stoney Creek School functions giving a sense of warmth, allowing stakeholders to chat over a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

Janice also set out to create opportunities for educational team members to engage in collaborative reflection that she believed would start to bring about change. Weekly staff meetings and informal conversation provided opportunity for teachers and support staff members to talk about student achievement. Further opportunity was always given to parents and community members. A parent who was waiting in the hallway to pick up her child commented that:

> At Stoney Creek School when it comes to the decision making process, I think everything involves the parents. They want our input. Of course they don't come to us for all the daily little menial things that need to be decided. We're talking about the important decisions of the way our children will be educated and how they will move ahead in achievement.

A community volunteer while meeting with a female junior high student over lunch shared that:

> Participation at Stoney Creek School is a privilege and I feel that my opinions and views are listened to. I have been coming here for years. The work that I have done with this student has helped her to advance in achievement. This young lady has some great ambitions. Janice really makes me feel that the work that I am doing here is valued. In this same way the students at Stoney Creek School make you feel important!

The school secretary remembers:

> Right from the beginning Stoney Creek has been a special place. I've always said that. In past years staff used to say "we have moose blood running through our veins." But the school and everything about it that is so special really does become a part of each and every one of us I think. When the junior high program started, the founders and staff of the young women's program didn't quite buy in as much to the building, the history

> and just you know how special of a place we are, because they had their own uniqueness. During the first three years the founders were very involved, because their girls were still attending this school. We had to honor the fact that we were still doing trust building and we had to make sure that they knew that their goal was our goal. We're all headed to the same place and we really did want to put their philosophy into practice and how it was going to look. Well it changed every year as both society members and staff constantly worked together to implement the C.E.E.D.S. (Curriculum, Enrichment, Extension and Days program) concept and other parts of the program. That experiential learning that the founders talked about to begin with, we're now doing it! It's taken all these years to evolve to probably what it is that they would have liked.

Stakeholders generally felt that both the young women's program and the C.E.E.D.S. programs have allowed them to focus on meeting the needs of students and the areas most in need of being addressed to improve student programs for optimum achievement.

Janice spoke at great length about the dimensions of accountability and responsibility as she has experienced them in her journey at Stoney Creek. For example, she said:

> Accountability sounds like an external word. Accountability in my mind measures the provincial government. In personalizing accountability, the most important thing is to be accountable to myself. To do that, I need to be responsible to make good choices.

In being assigned to Stoney Creek School Janice was aware that she would be held accountable for the overall functioning of the school and improvement in student achievement. The school district monitors progress in student achievement for each school and the government also publishes these data. An assistant principal commented on the importance of making sure teachers understand the district perspective on accountability for student achievement:

> I don't believe that at all times all our teachers are on the same level of awareness or understanding of the district vision, so how do you bring the district vision into a school where teachers really are solely focusing on their classroom student achievement within their four walls? We know that they can do a great job within their four walls but we have a bigger responsibility to the district, but we don't want to put that weight on their shoulders, so how do you push the work forward without overwhelming them with it? Well I've taken it upon myself to do a lot of explaining because I feel once you give the knowledge to people that they will understand the importance and significance of student achievement data for moving learning ahead and they will support our school focus.

Janice was always aware of the necessity of being accountable to the district. At the same time she felt it necessary to ensure that the change that would take place at Stoney Creek would be because of a genuine sense of responsibility that she and other stakeholders felt. She said it this way:

> In helping people to grow, I see shared leadership as a tool for building one another up in doing the most important work. If leadership is truly about learning and growing then we need to understand that it is about instilling good in one another, it's about intrinsic reward, it's about doing your best and your knowing you've done well. That's what I love about education, I love the passion of teachers, they are people that want to make a difference with kids. Even the most resistant negative teacher, once you've uncovered all the layers of frustration that have evidenced themselves in what appears as a crusty exterior, it is still their initial choice of attitude that counts, their commitment to making a difference with kids that can be tapped into.

Janice hoped that positive change would result from all educators accepting responsibility for student learning and, in doing so, discovering that they are leaders. Janice's efforts to facilitate positive change began during the summer prior to her first year as principal at Stoney Creek.

First Steps

During the summer before school started, Janice Zorac spent hours at the school striving to transform the environment so that teachers and support staff members would feel valued. She saw that the school was run down. At first glance she saw that the furnishings were old, tattered and lacked any sense of coordination. Janice vividly remembers:

> We immediately changed some physical parts of the building. My mom worked 50 hours helping me. For example: I saw a staff room that didn't have enough chairs for the number of staff. Therefore, in order to create a more professional environment for our staff, we organized everything from the drawers in the staff room to gathering up chairs that were the same and ordering new tables to create a more functional and inviting atmosphere. We also set up many displays and created inviting bulletin boards that focused on the word learning. This was a strong signal to people that things were going to be very different as they came back into the building in the fall.

The response from staff members was overwhelming. Teachers were excited at the improved cleanliness of the environment and at how orderly things appeared.

The room provided a sense of belonging for teachers and they knew that this new principal would care for their needs. One of the secretaries remembers that from this time on visual thematic decorations could be seen throughout the school:

> For every season we have ornaments and flower arrangements that are put out in the office, staff room and show case areas. Of course the moose is our theme and we collect all kinds of stuffed moose. This not only provides a sense of character but makes the environment welcoming and a great place for all to work.

Another change related to there having previously been two segregated staff rooms, one for elementary teachers and the other for junior high. Janice amalgamated them into one. Teachers of the elementary program saw this as both positive and negative as they had further to walk to get to the staff room considering the large expanse of the school and the many stairs to climb in consideration of the limited time allotments for lunch and recess breaks. An experienced elementary teacher explains:

> I see the importance of having one staff room, but time does not allow this to function well. As an elementary teacher I am responsible to make sure that my students are dressed up appropriately for recess and that everyone gets outside safely after their bathroom break. This takes up a quite a bit of time. At recess and lunchtime there are also often things that I must do to set up or prepare for the next lesson, so it makes it very hard for me to get over to the staff room just because of its

> location. It's not that I don't want to go and socialize; in fact I really want to and need to. At times I have felt more isolated because of this. Therefore we as elementary teachers have just dropped into one another's room or visited in the hall or conference room on the main floor.

Both junior high and elementary teachers understand this problem and have sought to find other opportunities to overcome this situation by making connections through participating in after school activities.

The First Staff Meeting

Teachers vividly remembered their first staff meeting with Janice in the Stoney Creek School library. They recalled that the room was decorated with a fall festive atmosphere and that music played quietly in the background. The smell of fresh coffee was evident and pastry dainties were on the tables for staff members to enjoy. The details of the first staff meeting were planned carefully and as one teacher put it everything was "immaculate."

As the first day went on it became apparent to Janice that the teachers did not mix easily and were not used to working in cross-graded groupings. Janice's belief was that if teachers could work with teachers from different divisions they would develop a holistic understanding of student learning. She believed that:

> teachers would begin to understand the expectations that each other has for students at the various grade levels expanding

> from kindergarten to grade nine, and in the same way develop a stronger process for walking Stoney Creek students through the curriculum expectations. This interaction would provide for group planning that would mix teachers up causing new synergy and ultimately new comfort levels for developing a strong team for all that would happen at Stoney Creek School.

It was evident that Janice's observations didn't coincide with her beliefs. Teachers seemed to only visit with teachers that they directly worked with and didn't see the need for dialogue with someone from a different division. Janice believed that the more segregated people were, the more difficult it would be to get them on board. An elementary teacher commented:

> It is hard to make an informed decision when you don't know the people from the other divisions. Although at first I was hesitant and didn't know anyone, I knew it was important to get to know one another. For me that was the real reason for entering into the process. Janice stressed the importance of learning from one another and that through this collaboration we would begin to understand the impact we have on what happens at other grade levels. I'm not a social person and to plan with other grade levels is hard, therefore it will take time for me to find the full meaning in this.

Janice spoke of "synergy and passion" as essential qualities for educators. Her experiences in this first day led her to believe that these qualities were not as evident among her staff as she would have hoped. This made it even more important for Janice to set a tone that would set the stage for a focus on student success. She commented:

> I have watched people get into trouble in schools because of their resistance and sabotage of good work. Groups of teachers can work against one another with a negative competitiveness because adult agenda has been honored and given the stage.

> From my experience that just doesn't happen if you just keep coming back to students. We expect the kids to make good choices; I expect the staff to make good choices. They can question, it's not groupthink, and let's have a really good debate. But we're going to do it around the student agenda, so I won't go there. Yet people say that I'm very supportive of staff but I'm not here for staff agenda, I'm here for student agenda at all grade levels.

The administration team was already seeing change as a result of Janice's new leadership. As one assistant principal put it:

> Some of the things that we see have become so ingrained in who we are we don't see it [referring to a practice he felt was negative] as a separate issue and it is hard therefore to reflect on it. Janice has really helped us with this.

Some of the resistance that Janice had felt at that first staff meeting had built up over a number of years. The elementary and junior high programs had taken on a sense of being valued differently. This was reflected, not only in the teachers' demeanor, but also in the decreasing enrollment in the elementary program. A long-time parent observed:

> We needed a big change. We looked to Janice for leadership and guidance to help us find a way to make school more interesting for our little ones, get discipline under control and get more kids into the school so that the elementary program could be revitalized. The girls program also needed help. Students were sitting there silently but not engaged in the learning.

Over the previous five-year period the elementary program had decreased by 100 students. Clearly the energy created by the opening of the young women's program the year before had brought new life to Stoney Creek, but at the same time the elementary program suffered as parents and teachers of elementary students heard the community talk about the young women's school as opposed to Stoney Creek School. As Janice remembers:

> The young women's program was big and vibrant, lots of parent involvement, almost the opposite of the elementary program. So what the elementary was going through was a mourning process. They had this huge building, slowly emptying because we had lost 100 kids over a five-year period prior to my arrival. So the girls program came in bigger than life and all of a sudden elementary students couldn't have their daily phys. ed. in a gymnasium. They had to learn that it didn't take a gymnasium to have daily phys. ed. There were scheduling issues. They didn't have as much gym time as they wanted. This was just one example that became a big problem.

Frustration was setting in as the elementary program lost its identity. Janice vividly remembers the negative thinking teachers expressed during a meeting where discussion was supposed to be focused on solutions for programming in the Stoney Creek elementary program:

> I was using the thinking hats model and I remember having to say, let's not wear the black hat immediately. We hardly got to the in-service that I had planned, the black hat thinking was most prevalent and I ended the meeting by saying, this isn't about programs, this is about revitalizing the Stoney Creek elementary program, whatever we do is going to be incredibly hard work.

There needed to be a change in the way teachers valued themselves, students and their program. A third year teacher remembers the chat in the staff room and hallways that took place amongst staff members due to the immediate change in atmosphere when Janice took action:

> Janice was very hands on, very quick to respond. As a staff we appreciated her involvement and timeliness. We appreciated that our concerns were listened to. She not only said she cared, she demonstrated it.

Janice Zorac saw a need to "start getting people talking about change" while at the same time being attentive to addressing the ongoing daily needs of students, teachers and parents. She believed this would send a strong visual message that "change is happening and will continue to happen."

Consultation with Parents and School District

As the principal and assistant principals met with parents at Stoney Creek School they found that there were many more concerns with the elementary program than with the junior high program. The junior high program was new and, although needing some fine-tuning in regard to programming, for the most part was a big hit. Parents had already been through a visioning process in order to break new ground with the young women's program. In establishing the program, parents had met for over a year to investigate the viability of the program, to formulate a strong vision and to create buy-in from community and school board stake holders. This process became the glue that solidified the young women's program and gave strength to the implementation of the vision. A junior high parent recollects a few key issues that came out during these discussions:

> The whole thing began with an admiration for the founder of the original society herself, Nellie McClung. She was one of the famous five, a handful of Alberta women who fought in court during the 1920's to have women recognized as persons. School officials regard her as a superb role model for young girls. The Junior High Program for Young Women was not designed to be a school. It is a program. Research shows that girls do better academically and exhibit greater confidence and self-esteem in all-girls schools. The reason we chose to have girls wear uniforms was to reduce class distinctions and to help shift students' focus from clothes competition to academic achievement.

The elementary school council also wanted to embrace a philosophical attitude that would be theirs. In doing so they started to focus on: what did they want their kids to be able to demonstrate by the time they left Stoney Creek at the end of Gr. 6? They watched videos such as the "Common Miracle" and read articles that gave them new insight into what schools can look like. As a result they created a new vision for schooling. A new, yet very involved parent stated that the dialogue at meetings focused around a common belief. She summed up this belief as follows:

> I don't believe that it's my school or the teachers' school. I believe that it's the community's school and we need to create the school that meets the community's needs, and we need educators in our school that will do that.

As parents talked about what they wanted Stoney Creek School to look like for their elementary children they realized that they wanted to create an environment that would engage students' learning in a way that related the learning to real life experiences. This, they felt, would help students understand how society works and the importance of their role in the same. During this discussion Janice felt:

> it was necessary in these meetings that while establishing what they wanted to see in their child's programming, parents and teachers also needed to understand how they feel when they're going through change. Therefore I used William Bridge's stuff on managing transitions. We also watched Joe Barker's video, which was a great springboard for talking about paradigm shifts and discussing how we could fulfill our vision.

As a result of these meetings Janice sought advice from a consultant from the School District office. Through these discussions Janice came to the conclusion that a program called MicroSociety could possibly fit the bill. The district agreed that Janice should attend a conference in the United States and visit several schools that had already implemented MicroSociety. As a result of attending the conference and observing the program in action in two schools Janice was convinced that MicroSociety was the way to go.

> After coming back from observing the MicroSociety program in some American Schools, I introduced the parents to Micro after Christmas I think, at least before spring break. They loved it. I said here's the strategy, what do you think of this? at one of the meetings. One of the parents responded, "Janice, this isn't a choice, our kids need this." And everyone said "yes, go for it." So then I presented it to staff and it was a very different meeting. It appeared to me it was more important for them to leave by four o'clock than to talk about the future and vision for the elementary program.

Clearly timing was important, so Janice chose to put a hold on it until the next school year. She believed that it was important to deal with other issues that would help to set a solid basis for meeting the community's needs through the implementation of this program. Most importantly, Janice believed it was important to ensure that all educators in Stoney Creek School were committed to a common vision that would be foundational to creating a school that would meet the community's needs.

A Staff Choice

If colleagues of Janice Zorac were asked about her reputation as a principal in the School District they might say: "If you want to learn and you want to work really hard, you'll love working with Janice. If you're a traditional teacher who wants to remain doing things the way you've always done them and not work very hard, you don't want to work with her." Janice finds this reputation totally acceptable and has seen it as helpful in attracting a staff that is focused on learning and leading. She believes that people's beliefs can have a profound effect on the educational climate that the staff creates for their students and themselves. Janice tells the following story of a retired school superintendent who was supervising student teachers for the University of Alberta. Janice took this as confirmation of her view that the beliefs she hoped to find among her staff were not yet in place:

> He had been in the building (Stoney Creek School) for no more than a day supervising student teachers and he walked into my office, shut my door and said you've got a bunch of teachers here that don't want to be teaching and probably don't want to be here. What are you doing about it as a school principal?

> They were laughing, and appeared to be happy people in the staff room, but you could literally see them transform as they walked back to their classrooms. They became cold, not very happy people and they weren't very nice to children. There was no joy.

During future staff meetings much discussion took place in regard to Janice's vision for the school and the need for moving student achievement ahead. At a culminating staff meeting, once again Janice explained that the work was going to be hard and yet rewarding. It would take a committed team effort to make the changes necessary to ensure success for all Stoney Creek students and Janice enquired as to who was onside:

> Please let me know by next Monday if you are in or not. I had emails that said, "I'd like out," "I'd like a different school," "I've been here a long time," and some that said "I'm staying but I don't know if I want to work that hard." That was kind of the culture.

Teachers who shared with her that they would be seeking a transfer were placed in other assignments within the school district. This process of teachers leaving and others renewing their commitment to Stoney Creek School was the beginning of a new look for the Stoney Creek educational team. Since then teachers have noted great change in the professionalism on staff and their personal desire for continued growth. Gail a second year teacher talks about the personal support she received from the principal and staff members in relationship to her professional growth.

> Janice as the principal has really supported my growing to the next level. A big part of that are her ideas, she thinks out of the

> box and then she just seems to bring other professionals in as well. During staff meetings and our professional development opportunities she presents many creative and useful practical ideas that staff can take back to the classroom and use. Along with this, the staff just seems to click. Everyone is so open to everybody's ideas, if someone has something that they've experienced or that works in their classroom or they've gone to an inservice they easily share it. I believe that we're just all so open to growing!

In spite of the heavy work schedule and considerable effort needed for change, all staff members interviewed spoke positively about their growth both personally and professionally as a result of working at Stoney Creek School.

Exploring Results for Change

The changes in staff created opportunity for a renewed focus on student achievement. The Stoney Creek educational team spent much time going over the District Survey results and the Alberta Achievement Test results in order to establish a focus area that would become the foundation for a united effort in moving achievement forward. District Survey results provide information on how parents and the community perceive students learning needs are being met. The Alberta Achievement Test results provide achievement data for grades three, six and nine.

This activity in which teachers and support staff members worked together to analyze achievement data was the beginning of the collaborative process for Stoney Creek School. Staff meetings focused on student learning as opposed to dealing with daily operational issues. An assistant principal commented on what he saw to be the outcome of this shift in orientation:

> Our premise has been that we need to mentor student achievement. As an educational team we create models and encourage risk taking for implementing models that will transfer into student achievement. As a result of the way we have effectively collaborated we have seen much growth in student learning. Because of our team collaboration we have come to realize that there is a lot of subjectivity in evaluating the impact of new programs on student learning. So together we have been able to come to the realization that you also need to look at the things that kids give you day to day, we're not just talking about test scores anymore we're talking about student achievement. We're talking about the way kids articulate their learning, we're talking about how comfortable kids are in expressing their feelings about their learning and their opinions about it. We're now talking about kids as problem solvers. I am very proud to work at this school because I see our students have come such a long way and in relation to teachers, we've totally all come out of our comfort zones. We have found many different and innovative ways to get results when we're talking about student achievement and what's best for kids.

This process has continued and data have become the basis for collaborative inquiry for improving learning for the students at Stoney Creek School. As I observed teachers in team meetings, whether cross-graded or divisional, conversation was highly focused on the students' learning needs and the application of current research. This process of analyzing and discussing achievement data contributed to staff and parents buying into the implementation of the Curriculum, Enrichment, Extension and Days program

(C.E.E.D.S.) for the young women's program and the MicroSociety program for the elementary students. Although these programs have very different presentation styles, they have similar underlying principles that aim at building strong individuals through encouraging leadership skills. An experienced junior high teacher speaks of the strength that both of these programs have provided for learning at Stoney Creek School:

> MicroSociety and C.E.E.D.S. are very student oriented and from my experience students really take ownership. In C.E.E.D.S. we've been planning various events throughout the year and my girls come up with an idea, they'll write out a proposal and give it to me. The students really have the opportunity to grow personally in the Stoney Creek atmosphere. From the administration downwards, you're not going to be judged, you're not going to be slapped on the back of your hand if you express an opinion that perhaps the administration doesn't agree with. Listening to everyone's ideas and making everyone feel that their idea or opinion is just as important as your own is really important.
>
> In the same way Microsociety helps students to show respect and how to get along. They get involved in real life experiences that help them to manage situations that help students to assert their beliefs in decision making. The program sets up students as leaders so they can be a role model to others.

Both programs allow students to experience and gain an understanding of democratic relationships. Under Janice's guidance teachers saw C.E.E.D.S and Microsociety as the underlying support programs for moving all curriculum forward at Stoney Creek School.

New Ways of Performing

Immediately upon entering the school, Janice knew that a refocusing of the school discipline policy was needed. Suspensions were given out for inexcusable behavior based on the zero tolerance policy of the school district. Janice Zorac felt strongly that a firmer stance was needed. She vividly remembers:

> In elementary I suspended four division two kids the first week. My secretary thought there might be some repercussions with that; I had two parent phone calls thanking me. We immediately declared it a non-violent zone because play fighting was out of control and I banned play fighting. We worked with the positive behavior evolution from the old major, minor system that wasn't really being followed to the current zero tolerance, nonviolent place. There was immediate improvement in both programs with behaviors and I think teachers were pleased with that as well. These caused teachers to program differently and therefore become engaged in the use of new strategies such as cooperative learning and graphic organizers that first year.

Changing the school discipline policy brought about the necessity for teachers to change their behavior. With a new discipline policy teachers were held accountable for monitoring discipline and following up with parents of students who broke the rules. Teachers talked with one another both informally and formally in order to find solutions for problems. This helped to create a unified way of mentoring students. As teachers started to see themselves as role models, not just disciplinarians, yelling by teachers stopped and the jostling of students in the hallways was almost non-existent.

The conversations about discipline were the beginning point for strengthening communication amongst staff members.

Communication soon took on new meaning amongst staff members. Conversation became focused around student learning. A teacher who had been at the school two years prior to Janice's coming reflects back on the support that Janice gave to teachers in creating an atmosphere for open communication:

> I feel that immediately Janice and her administration team created an atmosphere that helped people feel more comfortable. As a result if you don't agree with something you can feel very comfortable to express your opinion and it will not be perceived that you are being defiant, it's just that you have a concern. Now I feel that other teachers know that I'm concerned with the welfare of the students and I think most staff members feel the same way that their concerns are accepted as being expressed on behalf of the students. It's not a personal gain or anything like that.

Daily messages were also posted on all of the entrance doors of the school so that everyone entering the building was informed as to what was taking place. Specific listening times were created during which classical music was played to expand student appreciation for the fine arts. A junior high parent summed up the impact of the listening experience as "energetic ambience flowing in every part of the school." At other times music was piped into the hallways to enhance the environment for learning. Parents conveyed that many of their students now listen to classical music while studying at home.

The effects of this listening program were felt at home and helped to engender parent support and involvement at Stoney Creek School.

Immediately upon Janice Zorac's arrival parents were encouraged to volunteer their services by supporting special events, going on fieldtrips, working with students or preparing student materials. A parent talked about her volunteering at Stoney Creek School as 'participation in leadership." Another parent suggested that:

> Every parent has the opportunity to participate in their child's education at Stoney Creek School. It's just that some parents don't take the opportunity that is available to them. It could be just as simple as attending a parent association meeting or we're welcome to work with the children or assist the teachers in other ways.

Community volunteers were also solicited for a student mentorship program. As a result many volunteers come in to the school to work with students in a one-on-one basis.

Principal's Thinking During the Change Process

Janice believed that focusing her team on student achievement and high expectations for the same would drive the process of change at Stoney Creek School. She believed that dialoguing about student needs and seeking to resolve those learning needs would evolve into a focus on teaching thinking skills throughout the whole school. Janice believed that C.E.E.D.S. and MicroSociety could contribute to this. Teachers also saw these programs as providing them with the language for engaging in leadership related to the focus on student achievement. Carmen a second year teacher stated:

> The language of Stoney Creek School is MicroSociety, C.E,E,D,S, and Thinking Skills. MicroSociety and C.E.E.D.S. have become so ingrained into the culture of the school. They are foundational to all that we do. Our focus on Thinking Skills has been something that we added later as we began to understand the data from achievement tests, anecdotal records and looking at student work. Janice is also very much a thinking, learning based person and this is the language that she has been speaking to us since she got here. All of a sudden it all just made sense. The Thinking Skills component provides a support for all that is taught.

Typically conversations about student learning at Stoney Creek were steeped in the processes of MicroSociety, C.E.E.D.S. and application of Thinking Skills processes. In most meetings and casual conversations teachers speak the mantra of at least one of these innovations. At first Janice conscientiously brought teachers back to these foundational values and now they do it naturally. They see it as the glue that holds them all together.

Janice was also very quick to respond to staff concerns. Teachers clearly note that they continue to appreciate this about Janice. A long-time teacher explains:

> I think that this is really a professional school and people really respect professional expectations. If there is a problem it is usually brought right to your attention. If you have a concern, you can feel free to

> share it, and Janice is very quick to address the issue. Even when you are talking to Janice about a specific curriculum issue, often the next day you will find an article in your mailbox that is about the topic you discussed with her. Janice's support is incredibly strong. I know that the staff really appreciates this about her.

An assistant principal observed that teachers have become more apt to jump in and help out one another in times of need as a result of this type of mentoring:

> We have become a very close team. People will step in and help each other without thought, it just happens. We had a staff member who was very distressed about a death. Everyone else just stepped in and helped her, took over, no pretense, no grumbling. And that creates an atmosphere that is conducive to growth because people know they are well supported.

At the same time Janice set high expectations for a solution focused approach in the building. Janice believed that:

> Teachers needed to be future oriented in helping students and parents to visualize solutions to problems that they face on a day-to-day basis.

In the same way Janice believed that teachers needed to be able to solve their own problems positively. She saw this as essential to the development of a cohesive team. She stated to staff members:

> The expectation is that we will be solution focused in this building. Whenever I heard somebody wasn't, I talked to that person privately and I started coaching people to think in terms of, if you are concerned about something, ask them about it. So I confronted in a very cooperative way and in a very solution orientated way.

Along with seeking answers to readily seen problems, she brought forward discussions about vision and paradigm shifts through the use of William Bridge's processes to managing transitions. A junior high teacher reflected on the process, observing that she thought it was Janice's hope that:

> this would help teachers develop the desire to develop their own set of leadership skills in collaboration with each other. In this way it is important to involve the strengths of the people around you if you want to get a shared sense of vision and to elicit those strengths from people.

Initially Janice saw several things that she believed needed changing. For example she said:

> The problem was multi-pronged in that while supporting one program, we were creating the demise of the other. We were content with the fact that we were "special" because we had the girls program. We had neglected to focus on the differentiation of that program. At the same time in the elementary program our presentation of curriculum was being maligned by behavior problems as a result of poor classroom management.

She wanted teachers to see that the elementary program was weak and needed a restructuring and strengthening. At the same time, young women's program teachers needed to realize that, although the new junior high program had been operationalized well, it still looked very much like a traditional junior high program and therefore programming needed much embellishment. As Janice states, she "got them involved in the work."

Principal as Leader

Very soon after her appointment as principal, those at Stoney Creek began to see Janice as a catalyst for change. Consider these comments:

> As a parent I think it is the choices of the leadership that counts and is what gets change going. Janice knows exactly what she wants and she knows in detail the programs that are in the school and what it's going to take to run those programs. For example: the type of people needed, the skills that they have and their interaction style with other people; she hand picks them, I'm sure of it.
>
> As a teacher I have been here before and during Janice's principalship. Janice has challenged us to become our best. She has been an inspiration for change and helping us to become our best. It hasn't always been easy, as she has challenged us to step out of the box.

Based on my discussions I believe there is now a unanimous understanding that her strong, unyielding leadership was needed to get them started on the road to change. A teacher, now assistant principal, who has been there since the beginning of Janice's appointment to Stoney Creek School seemed to concur:

> that Janice's 'kids first' attitude has served her well. I think Janice's done an excellent job in communicating that and it's been six years since the moment she walked into this building and she's communicated that the adult agenda takes the back seat to student agenda. Teachers have now developed that attitude and it's tough you know, we're human beings and we realize that we're dealing with adults a lot of times, but I think that the 'kids first' focus is what really keeps us all grounded.

Janice clearly sees her role as principal is to create an atmosphere that is conducive to growth because people know they are well supported. Janice supports them through providing opportunities for professional growth and in building collegial relationships. Even those people who chose to leave Stoney Creek School were relocated positively. Janice's focus is on what is "best for students, not just what is good." She believes that everything she does must create an advantage for students to grow in student achievement:

> It's a privilege to be a principal in a school even though it's my job too; it's all about servant leadership. I have constantly asked myself the question, how do I facilitate the growth process [helping teachers to help students grow in student achievement] that happens to be in a school so it's teaching and learning appropriately?

Janice's goal has been to create team relationships that support conversation that revolves around programming, what's best for kids, what they are doing in their classrooms, what they can do to help each other. During one of our earliest interviews Janice described her intention of building an administrative leadership team that she hoped would help create a "synergy," a zest for sharing together in the leadership of the school. One of Janice's assistant principal's summed it up as follows:

> There is a lot of focus on the work. You need to model what you expect. We expect teachers to be very focused on student achievement an on our focus initiative and they are. One of the things that I had to learn in becoming an administrator is that as a teacher I was a teacher of students. Now I'm a teacher of teachers and the teacher of students. The transition for me of course was challenging. I had to learn to be the teacher of teachers as well. However in some ways the two are very

> similar. For example: we may talk about something in a program meeting such as using the language of focus or using the language of our five best practices. You may not see people grab on to these concepts right away. It has to make sense, it has to be processed by the person but it comes back to you eventually and then you go ahha! They did hear us. They have internalized it, practiced it, conversed about it and ultimately helped us to refine a best practice that makes Stoney Creek School better. So then you build on it by setting up situations where that's possible like looking at "doing work protocols" or like talking about our "interim measure."

Teachers unanimously saw Janice as one who effectively mentors leadership. She was seen as knowledgeable and as encouraging staff members to take risks in applying new knowledge to daily experiences. However, Janice herself admitted that she is a "control freak" and as much as this has assisted her with the planning aspects for ensuring that the details are taken care of, at times this trait has worked against her intention of empowering staff members. She is very open about this aspect of her leadership style. That openness is apparent in this junior high school student's comment:

> I can be really controlling when it's something I care about. When it's something I care about I want my ideas to be heard but I'm ready to accept someone else's ideas if it's better. I think I'm more of a leader because I'm brought up in a household where my mom would give me responsibilities from the time I was little. Now I do what just needs to be done, kind of creepy in some way. In fact I find myself to be a lot like Miss Zorac. (Another student interjects: That's why they clash!) Yeah, we can clash sometimes. We challenge one another because I think we are similar. We are both controlling perfectionists. Miss Zorac has told me in one of our talks that I can learn from her mistakes in this area, it will save me years!

Teachers and students saw such honest admissions by Janice as one of her strong traits. They saw her as open, and wearing her heart on her sleeve.

This same sincerity shows through in Janice's involvement in the health and wellness aspects of her co-workers lives. An experienced teacher, new to the young women's program, talked about an incident that took place in which she felt supported and cared for:

> Well I can think of an issue that happened with a kid. I was assaulted by a student, punched and practically knocked over. It really upset me, it was in block six so it was the last block of the day and I was in total shock because I didn't expect it obviously and as you know by my size I'm not that big. The girls are bigger than me, most of them. So anyway I was really upset and I went home and my husband, I told him, I was crying and my husband said to me "you were assaulted." So I came in first thing in the morning and went in to Janice's office and I told her and she was incredibly supportive. I could not believe how supportive! She took it so seriously, like even I didn't realize the seriousness of it. I knew the girl would get in trouble but Janice went all the way with it and I was very thankful for that. They suspended her. Janice and the assistants have demonstrated care and emotional support on numerous occasions. I really appreciate their support. I never have to worry about going to them for help.

I observed that Janice often does kind deeds for staff members such as bringing in lunch for them, sending a kind note of thanks or leaving a treat on their desk. Janice's support for teachers goes even beyond kind deeds; she is "hands-on," involved in meeting with teachers in program meetings and case conferencing. She aims to model what she expects.

The great majority of administrators and teachers believe that Janice is very consistent with her message and what she expects. An assistant principal comments:

> Janice is very good at articulating the vision of our school and providing the big picture for us all. I believe what I am saying speaks for most teachers as I hear over and over again that teachers know what Janice's expectations are and that the support provided is excellent. We as a teaching team believe that this has helped us to buy in and to understand what she sought to accomplish. Her expectations are very clear in relationship to her daily reinforcement of "kids first."

This rapport is also evident with other principals and people who work in central office. This same assistant principal states:

> It is also interesting to note when you go to central office for meetings with others and people in the district, they are also aware of her commitment and as a result show great respect for her work. Janice is very articulate and this has helped to engender the interest of those who work downtown [central office]. Janice is always sure to explain how what we are doing at the school level fits into the district picture.

Janice is a strong advocate of the school district and seeks to support its philosophies and initiatives. One teacher summed up the feelings of a few staff members who perceived that this commitment, along with her strong personality, has caused her and her administrative team at times:

> to give the illusion that we as teachers have a voice. . . maybe that's because the particular subject or topic that we're talking about is important to the administration and then with other things that aren't quite as important we are given more of a voice making it more of a shared thing, a cooperative thing. I would like to see more of a voice like this for everything.

These teachers were concerned that, at times, staff members were led through a process of decision making when the school district or the administration team had already made the decisions. One teacher suggested "the district often resorts to this strategy, therefore mentoring the same in principals." Through discussions with Janice, I am also aware of the same struggle she has faced in regard to implementing district expectations. My journal notes indicate:

> Janice believes that she, as a leader, should bring out the best in others. Therefore she holds high expectations for all staff members and for herself. Janice has put in many hours working late nights at the school.

Similarly, teachers at this school put in many hours. One consequence has been that teachers, at times, feel taxed and overworked. Every teacher interviewed saw this as his or her own problem, one they share with many teachers. One teacher stated:

> My husband tells me that I have very high expectations for myself. I type out my lesson plans and spend so much time making sure that the lesson will be exciting and maybe it's at the expense of my family. But I think I've done this for three years now I hope I get to teach the same subject next year so that maybe I will have a little bit more time with my family.

Even with this feeling of being overworked, many times during interviews and casual conversations, staff spoke to me about supporting one another and feeling fulfilled in their jobs. In the same way Janice has modeled strong support for her teachers since coming to Stoney Creek School.

Teachers are aware that the principal's leadership comes from a philosophy Janice has brought to Stoney Creek School. An assistant principal stated:

> Janice believes that it is important to accept the specific personality traits of each other and that staff members are helped to see these quality traits in one another. You must demonstrate that you value their leadership and their opinion. Most importantly the number one priority of administration is to clear the path for teachers in order for them to be able to do their job at the highest level.

In order to reinforce this philosophy Janice and the administration spend a lot of time in conversation. A teacher observed that:

> The languaging of conversations is what helps to build all these relationships and builds this meaning that we share. It is apparent in these conversations that we have different skills and interests and we have grown to respect that. The young women's program and MicroSociety have given teachers a focus for all that we do and say. As facilitators of the programs we have to model what we're giving those teachers: choice, acceptability and creativity. In the same way we are asking our teachers to mentor these characteristics to their students.

Teachers talk about a shift and change in the conversations that have taken place over the past six years at Stoney Creek School. They see this as a result of Janice Zorac's leadership.

In this chapter we talked about the schools' need to make a change and the mandate given to Janice by the superintendent of schools. Janice specifically set out to cause change that would enhance the learning environment at Stoney Creek School. Janice felt that she needed to provide opportunity for incremental change that would help to change the mindset of staff members. She set the stage by providing staff and parents with many informal and formal opportunities for discussions about student learning. These conversations were about helping staff members to understand what it was that she saw needed to change. In order to gain a full understanding of the impact of these conversations we discussed several specific consultation times that took place with staff and parents. These conversations helped to give Janice a sense of who was on board with renewing their focus on student achievement.

More specifically, we took a look at Janice's beliefs and thinking during the change process and at how she and others saw her in the role of principal as leader. This chapter demonstrates Janice's strong orientation to relationships that is foundational in her journey toward constructivist leadership. The various sections of this chapter offer insights into Janice's personality and leadership style. They also illustrate some of the tensions she experienced in her efforts to move toward constructivist leadership.

Chapter Six:
Many Aspects of Leadership

Janice believed that "new and different working relationships were needed between teachers, parents and students in order for there to be any lasting contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning for Stoney Creek students." She consistently took every opportunity to engage each stakeholder group in conversations focused on ways for improving student achievement. Although conversations at first seemed contrived, as time went on the discussions took on new meaning as teachers realized the impact of these discussions on their own teaching. During these conversations each teacher was challenged to not only apply his or her own expertise to student learning, but to learn from one another and also apply the latest research to the lessons.

As a result of this consistent and constant focus, stakeholders became engaged in the sharing of leadership. They found out that leadership is really about a lot of things at this school. Leadership is about relationships that allow for direction from parents, students and teachers. My observation shows that there is high involvement by the majority of staff members in teacher leadership at Stoney Creek School. A District Public School Survey taken over the past three years also shows a high level of satisfaction on the part of teachers and parents when it comes to participation in the leadership of Stoney Creek School. The trend in this survey shows continual growth over this time period. During casual conversations with teachers this high level of satisfaction was confirmed as they emphatically stated that "parents and students were seen as partners in a democratic process for ensuring the best educational opportunities for students." As I interviewed teachers at Stoney Creek School they were able to articulate clearly their goals and strategies for their personal engagement in leadership and the mentoring of the same for students. Over time, teachers' goals have become aligned with those of the administration and parent community. Teachers spoke convincingly of the "together we can do it" mindset that is also reflected in the student body and in the parent community.

In this chapter I discuss the various ways that teachers participate in and experience leadership. The following analysis is grounded in the constructions and accounts of the participants. Where possible I have used participants' words and voices to support the interpretations. In order to glean further understanding about how leadership is constructed at Stoney Creek School, I also take a look at parents' and students' experiences in the participation of leadership. The teachers' experiences have been organized under the headings: "Teachers' Participation in Leadership," Collaborative Planning and Reflection," "High Expectations," "Motivation," "Power Sharing" and "Risk Taking." The students' and parents' experiences have been organized under the headings: "Students' Participation in Leadership" and "Parents' Participation in Leadership."

Teachers' Participation in Leadership

From the beginning, Janice Zorac's goal was to develop a strong educational team focused on meeting the needs of students. She believed that students would only achieve success if staff members individually took ownership for all that was said and done at Stoney Creek School. As a result staff would then develop a deep sense of responsibility. Janice states:

> Responsibility to me means there is high ownership. I see this clearly as tying into the whole mission of Stoney Creek School. We want to teach everyone that they need to be responsible to make good choices. When responsibility is shown we need to celebrate its success. I believe people need to be mentoring and instilling responsibility into our young people, it's about intrinsic reward, it's about doing your best because it feels good and you know you've done well. You're making a difference, you have been successful.

Janice's goal was to develop responsible staff members who were personally engaged in leadership. A teacher new to the school summarizes her personal understanding and experience of leadership at Stoney Creek School:

> In the formal sense of the word (leader), school is set up differently, there is the principal that is the leader, but then in our case we have a principal that somehow takes that leader role and makes it leadership and changes it in my mind. Somehow she pulls herself from that top, that pinnacle, into the middle of the circle with all these people around her, whether that would be teachers, staff members, students or community members. There is a sense that we are all in this together, sharing the leadership.

As I talked with teachers about their leadership experience, they readily talked about their sense of working toward a common purpose and that they saw the school as "a family" or "a community." Staff members are aware that they have created their own culture. Upon asking them if they had purposely set out in the beginning to build something new, most teachers answered "no," but realized that in fact, together they have created something new that is "dynamic" and "synergistic." A teacher speaks practically about her collaborative experience.

> I think it's important to involve the strengths of the people around you and we have seen this happen. If you have a team of people and you want to get to a shared goal it is important to elicit those strengths from the people. I think it means ending up with a greater sum than the individual parts. When you team up with someone by fusing your ideas you end up with a stronger product or process. It has to change the culture.

Just as this teacher speaks, most teachers can in fact talk about a cultural change that has happened over the past six years. When investigating this concept further, assistants and teachers were not able to talk about the philosophical background as to what the process was and why things had been implemented. Some attributed this to the fact that there had been a large turn over in staff members and others attributed it to the fact that they didn't need to know or understand the process they were involved in because they trusted their leader implicitly and this allowed them to focus on meeting student needs. Janice Zorac reflects on this dimension of the learning process for teachers:

> I didn't spend a lot of time talking to staff about what was happening to us as adults as I know others may have when creating a new culture. We focused on changing our teaching and learning. How can we refocus our instructional strategies? How it all fits back together to impact the classroom?

After spending time in the Stoney Creek milieu it is apparent that most if not all teachers clearly enjoy working together and that their relationships have developed because of this camaraderie and their common focus on meeting the "needs of kids." As professional colleagues a common belief held by staff members is that "the professional learning experiences of staff working together have become the basis for relationships and the growth noted in all areas of the school."

Collaborative Planning and Reflection

At Stoney Creek School teachers are frequently visiting and constantly connecting throughout the day. They seek opportunities to work on projects together, observe one another and to learn from each other. Teachers can often be seen meeting in small groups. They meet in classrooms, the staff room and in administrators' offices connecting over student work. A teacher who teaches in both school programs sees this kind of activity around the school as a positive intensity:

> I think there's a certain intensity. I guess I noticed that when I first came because I'm a pretty intense person and I'm used to being sort of you know the hard worker and stuff so I find that everyone's pretty much, I wouldn't say intense, I also wouldn't say laid back. Everyone works pretty hard and expects a lot

> from themselves, the students and the staff. Really focused, but not in a negative way because I kind of think of intensity as sort of buzzing, but it's a good intensity.
>
> My job allows me to participate in both divisional staff meetings and in planning activities at various grade levels. When we break into groups at staff meetings, I will go where it's most appropriate so it's good in a sense because I've gotten to know everyone a little bit.
>
> I have previously worked on another school staff and I know a lot of staffs are working at team building. It doesn't seem like a focus here but collaborative planning and the sense of team just seems to happen here.
>
> Planning and research groups sometimes are set up through staff meetings; at other times they just pop up as needed involving those who need to be involved. There is a strong sense of sharing our information with each other.

These opportunities for sharing and learning from one another have helped to forge strong relationships amongst staff members. This has caused a 'synergy' amongst staff members and therefore has resulted in staff feeling secure enough to take risks. Staff members are in constant dialogue with one another, which has resulted in a common vocabulary that is spoken throughout all groups and meetings. Teachers' staff meetings are focused on leading and mentoring students in a democratic atmosphere that replicates real life experiences for the future work world. An assistant principal suggests that this has occurred because of:

> shared leadership that empowers staff to develop to their fullest potential while interacting with one another. There is a deep sense that we all need to be positive role models for the kids. Therefore the conversations in the staff room are much different than conversations in staff rooms I've been in before. They are very kid focused, there's no kid bashing, there's a little bit of

> what we did on the weekend, which is fine, but it's mostly focused on what we're doing in class. We talk about how can you do it better? Can you and I get together and figure something out? We need to do this presentation, can we use your class time? Most of our conversation revolves around delivering curriculum to kids and making school a more positive, real life experience for them. We seem to speak a common vocabulary as a result of this collaborative work. It really lifts me up when I walk in on those conversations.

Learning or collaboration groups occur as needed and can take on a new look depending what the need is and who needs to be involved. Often students, parents, administrators and community members will be seen as part of these groupings. These meetings are seen as important and teachers believe that there is much to be gained from them. A teacher newer to the school explains:

> We have very regular meetings and the expectations for how you contribute to the group are consistently explained. The standard is that we're all really good at what we do and yet we all need to aim for excellence in what we do. We know that's expected too. It has a lot to do with the staff too, there's a lot of young staff, not just young there's older staff that are willing to think forward, new ways of doing things and questioning. People don't get defensive very often at this school, there's a high comfort level between staff.

The comfort level of staff is high due to the fact that all information is shared openly for everyone to participate in discussion. When this information is finally put into a written document it is known by everyone that it is always in draft form, "nothing is ever final." It is understood by everyone that hiding or distorting information won't lead to growth and improvement. The whole idea behind these collaborative meetings is to discuss and openly resolve problems providing an atmosphere of safety. A well-respected staff member reflects on her involvement in collaborative activities:

> Janice always says in staff meetings if you think something isn't good, be solution oriented. It is not a problem to question things; we just need to be part of making things better. Sometimes when collaborating it is a little complicated because I'd say some things are top down like our instructional focus, like that's set out by the district, this is what were doing, run with it, you don't get a choice, right, but the way we develop it is done in a constructivist way.
>
> For example: we are encouraged to make the instructional focus fit our students. We looked at their work and started building rubrics on how to assess our interim measures based on what the students are doing, not based on what someone says they should be doing and then reevaluating it and always keeping things as a work in progress. Being comfortable that it can always be in draft form and can always change. So not being afraid, I guess, to make a mistake or what if we make the wrong decision? We are always open to changing and adapting.

It is the goal of each member to discuss issues for the purpose of helping one another and learning from each other. However, there are disagreements that occur, but these are seen as opportunities to learn from one another, to reflect on student work and to find more effective ways for meeting students' learning needs in a more consistent manner. One of the processes modeled for staff members from Janice is that of "asking questions." It is her belief that asking good questions will provide more knowledge for seeking quality solutions together. An assistant principal shares a personal experience about a time when trying to argue with Janice:

> There is not a lot of gray area with Janice, often it is black or white. It's not that she always believes that she is right. I

> remember trying to argue with Janice and saying you are really hard to argue with because you ask really good questions. So it's not so much the answers but the questions that get us thinking about how to be creative problem solvers. She doesn't tell you what to do, I guess she is kind of suggesting things through getting me to think, in essence helping me to be responsible. She believes that it is her job to foster an attitude of servant leadership. She looks at how she facilitates the growth process in the school through teaching and learning. As a result teachers around here tend to ask more questions providing opportunities for learning on the part of themselves and others.

In the same way formal staff collaboration is inquiry based and takes place through working on the school's Instructional Focus on Thinking Skills. This common instructional focus is an area that the whole school works on in order to improve student achievement across the board.

As a result, the C.E.E.D.S. program implemented in the Junior High Program for Young Women, and the MicroSociety program as applied to the elementary program, have become foundational parts of addressing Stoney Creek's Instructional Focus. This concerted effort creates opportunities to collaborate and achieve a united effort taking away from the stress of individual responsibility for student learning. A junior high teacher stated:

> Stoney Creek is a great school. I think when people ask what's different about our school, what's special about our school, I think it's the teachers and the way we teach. Our philosophies in addition to the programming, with C.E.E.D.S. and MicroSociety being added to the curriculum make us very unique. The environment is pretty positive, pretty intense in that everyone is very focused on what they are doing. Everyone wants to achieve. It is very busy both with the teachers and the students. But at the same time while teaching is going on it

> seems to be very relaxed and focused. We are a very close staff. This year I'm feeling closer more than other years that I've been here. I believe that my participation in collaborating on planning various learning activities for students has helped me to be more connected and to develop some strong relationships. We have shared common experiences and shared ideas that we have been able to apply across grade levels. This has helped me to get to know teachers that I normally would not have.

Therefore, time was built into the schedule for collaborating during staff meeting times. Staff meetings were always focused around the school's Instructional Focus on Thinking Skills. Topics in regard to operational type things were dealt with through email and quick, small group meetings.

I specifically observed that teachers who were more outgoing seemed to easily fit into the collaborative atmosphere and had an attitude of "we can make this work," whereas other teachers didn't see the practicality for collaboration in a small school where there may be only one person teaching a specific subject. These teachers seemed to see it specifically as an exercise for planning. As one teacher noted:

> I think one of the main focuses in this school is collaborative planning which is excellent. The only problem is I don't know how to collaborative plan with somebody in elementary, for one we don't teach the same thing. When I taught at another school, there were tons of teachers that taught the same subject, so you collaborative planned and it was actually collaborative planning because you were all teaching the same thing. Here I am the only one teaching this grade in a specific subject. I am paired with someone who teaches the same subject at a different grade but the units are completely different. That is something I don't get, I don't know but the admin really wants us to collaborative plan and I see when I see the daily schedules, I see division one collaborative planning,

> I'm thinking okay is that a grade one teacher planning with a grade three cause how does that work? It hasn't been explained to me. I can see collaborative planning working when the subject matter is the same.

When asking teachers about the benefits and drawbacks of the collaborative process, one hundred percent of teachers stated that this was a positive way of working. Although as noted in the above quote there were "struggles with the initial change and fitting into this collaborative process." In discussing this further with the teacher above, she had more concern with the way collaborative planning was implemented rather than the "idea of collaborative planning itself." Sometimes the place or time didn't necessarily fit with the job that needed to be done. For example, collaborative planning is scheduled to take place in "the library on Thursday afternoon after school." Further exploration revealed this teacher believed that "they were involved every day of the week in lots of natural collaborative planning."

Various teachers saw the smaller size of the school as a contributing factor to various problems with scheduling, for instance some teachers needed to be at two collaborative meetings at the same time. Other issues resulted from the simple fact that some topics or issues that a teacher needed to collaborate with someone else on just didn't work due to the fact that no one else had reason for the work that was to be done. In spite of some of these logistics, teachers clearly see the collaborative process as having increased their opportunities for learning and has created higher expectations in curriculum delivery at Stoney Creek School.

High Expectations

The bar was raised as Janice Zorac implemented high expectations. As time went on, teachers held those high expectations for themselves and their students. In fact, the high level of quality of work has become a motivating factor for working at Stoney Creek School. Many teachers said their reason for applying to teach at Stoney Creek School was because the school now had a reputation for high expectations and they knew this would make them even better teachers. Especially teachers new to the profession described this sense of accountability as a tool for teaching them to personally be responsible for continuous growth and improvement. Here are a few comments from teachers:

> Teacher one: I think that it is really a professional school and people really respect professional expectations. I wanted to be a part of this success.
>
> Teacher two: I think it's pretty positive, pretty intense in that everyone is very focused on what they are doing. Everyone wants to achieve.
>
> Teacher three: I wanted to teach at Stoney Creek because of its reputation for high expectations for teachers. I wanted to be part of a teaching team that would push me to become even better.

Many teachers expressed that it was the consistent commitment to high expectations for all teachers that helped them to support one another and ultimately create shared beliefs. A consultant from Boston who has been working with the school district shares his first impression of Stoney Creek School:

> Wow, teachers are all going in the same direction, there isn't anyone in difficulty, they all are in that range of excellence, depending on experience, expertise, all of those things but they all want to become their personal best. And that personal best will help the school be the best it can be.

As Janice Zorac puts it, in helping teachers to become their personal best "[her] bottom line is professional development, high expectations and support." On the other hand some staff members feel that with this extreme focus on "high expectations" they have lost perspective in regard to their personal lives and stepped across the line into the "workaholic syndrome." As good as everything is, many teachers don't seem to feel that they have control of their workload and as a result lack balance in their lives. The concern is: how long they can keep performing this way?. As the school secretary pondered thoughts of balance and the idea of a relaxed work environment, she stated:

> No, I don't think I could say we're relaxed people in this building. I don't know if there are any relaxed people, but I think what we have is a team of high achievers. I think that's what comes in the door when you have a school like this. It attracts that kind of person. At one time only one teacher came into the school on a weekend, now there are so many people here working each weekend. Sometimes between seven or eight.

Teachers clearly appreciate the high expectations but find themselves in a dilemma that they believe they place on themselves. The question that has been asked over and over through conversations is "how good is good enough and when is enough, enough?" The staff is mostly made up of women and many expressed concern with the many other duties they have at home in raising children and taking care of the home. Many expressed that they felt their families were being neglected as a result of the high expectations that they personally buy into. Some wondered how long they could keep this up and questioned their personal motivation for working so hard.

Motivation

A key factor to the success of Stoney Creek School has been the staff's ability to develop a sense of shared purpose. Staff purposely worked together on the creation of a distinctive school culture that reflected the schools vision. A fourth year teacher states that:

> this is a school that really believes in student achievement. As a result we have created models for teaching and learning. We have encouraged risk taking in implementing these models that will transfer into student achievement.

This approach caused teachers to research the latest and most effective ways of curriculum delivery, thus developing school wide approaches to teaching. Teachers readily talk about the part that they played in this process and the need for keeping the momentum going. An assistant principal reflects on the journey:

> Teachers spend a lot of time together looking at student work and applying the latest research. I think the motivation for all of this hard work really comes from the fact that we all know that we have different skills and interests. We respect that and we want to share our expertise and the things that we value so much. We want to learn from one another in order to enrich our own experience for improving the quality of teaching and learning at Stoney Creek School.

Many teachers also talked about their personal motivation as being their focus on meeting the high expectations that have been set for them by administrators. An assistant principal comments:

> Janice and I have spent a lot of time talking about how we can motivate and assist teachers in developing a high level of performance. We have set high expectations for all staff members. Janice readily admits this. We believe that it is important to provide training that will give people the right tools for doing a superior job. Not to say that everything we have in place is perfect by any means. Janice would be the first one to say that it's not but there are some things that have been put into place to support the things that need to be done year to year to year in order to support teachers so that kids can achieve to their optimum level.

Others teachers talked about the "synergy" that is so empowering when working on a team of high achievers. As a result teachers have become a close-knit group both professionally and socially. Teachers at Stoney Creek have redefined the role of the teacher. Teachers strive to cause relationships that are friendship based within the confines of high expectations for positive behavior for everyone at Stoney Creek. A solid basis for this mentoring is evidenced when students see teachers relating to one another in professional and fun filled daily interaction. Students' comments affirm these positive teacher relationships:

> You can tell that teachers get along by the way they act around each other. It's like they're teenagers. Some of the teachers are so different, but they still work well with other teachers. I found last year better that this year, of course also teachers had different challenges to face. This year we had a lot of new teachers coming in and it's probably when new people come in they have new ideas and sometimes people can go off track and then go back on track. Some of the teachers get together for exercising, dinner etc. I know that Miss Jones and Miss Gardner go running. Smith and Jackson go swimming, like, every morning. Some of the younger teachers they like to do the athletics and some of the others like to go out to dinner. They all have pretty good relationships. And even the teachers that have left the school still have good relationships with the teachers that are still here. These teachers come back to Stoney Creek to celebrate student successes at special events.

Ultimately every teacher accredited the "success of students" as a reason for their ongoing motivation. However, they also talked about a lack of motivation at times because of a feeling of powerlessness when trying to implement new ideas.

Power Sharing

It is evident that there are many opportunities for teachers to share the leadership at Stoney Creek. One of the key struggles over the past six years has been the giving and taking back of power on the part of the administration team. This struggle is noted when the staff members have not grown to the same understanding as the administration who endeavor to implement district innovations. A staff member shared:

> I think it's important to share the goal with all of the stakeholders and let each expert on staff reach that goal in their own way but with guidance from the leader. There is no "one way" to a successful end. There needs to be a balance of collegiality and "colleagiality." There needs to be a levity and social time for bonding and trust building. To a certain extent, they should then trust the expertise of each staff member to meet those goals in their own way rather than dictating a specific path that must be followed. There needs to be the confidence of each staff member that they have the full support of their leader through good times and bad. Fairness and equality applied in all ways to all people.

However, in spite of these concerns most teachers and parents strongly feel they have input into the day-to-day running of the school. The types of input and levels of input vary with each individual. Most of the input is focused on planning and professional development for optimum curriculum delivery. It was expressed over and over that teachers have been given many opportunities for professional development. In turn they share this newfound information with the rest of the educational team. An experienced junior high teacher shares her personal experience:

> If you go to an inservice which would be useful to our staff, I'm sure that everyone would feel free to present their information. I guess in a way it is an expectation that you share the information. Everybody seems to be quite happy with this and participates when the opportunity arises. I know I have had the opportunity to share. It was hard at first, but now I enjoy it,

> especially the discussion that comes out of it. It causes me to think and as a result apply the new ideas I have learned.

Teachers tend to participate in training that specializes them in a specific area of teaching. They see this opportunity for training and sharing the information they have gleaned as empowering. Many teachers look to these teachers who have trained in specific areas as specialists and see them as show casing their best practices. They are sought out when the need for help arises. Many teachers expressed their appreciation for the empowerment to be creative and to take risks but would like to have more say in decisions that effect their personal assignments such as staff teaching assignments and timetabling.

Risk Taking

In trying to design a framework for building shared responsibility, Janice Zorac sought to provide an environment that would allow teachers to experiment with new research. Especially in the early days of her coming to Stoney Creek she often talked about "taking risks", not only for herself but on the part of others. She talks about "becoming vulnerable and sharing openly with her staff about her successes and failures." This atmosphere of risk taking has continued to prevail. While at Stoney Creek I saw a teacher take huge risks in leading a fund raising effort that would supply assistance to needy children in another country. It wasn't just the fact that raising the money was so risky, but the fact that this project was so closely tied with the true meaning of the girls program meant a huge impact on the future of the school and its ability to prove that they were a program that was different. In the same way everyone in the school saw this as important to the ongoing spirit of the program. If this fund raising project/partnership with another country was successful it would make a true mark on these young women for future service to our society and other countries around the world.

In talking to new teachers on staff there was more hesitancy to take risks as they were being evaluated. Although this was the circumstance, they knew that risk taking was encouraged, but the current political climate altered their ability to feel free to do so. Teachers had been made aware by the school district that as a result of government pressure to balance the budget, first year teachers would not be hired back for the next school year and they would be replaced with teachers that were already in the school system, meaning class sizes would also be significantly higher. As noted earlier, a clear demonstration of how this climate affected risk taking was noted in this survey when two teacher participants who had been most positive about their experience at Stoney Creek School returned their manuscripts totally blacked out with attached notes asking that they be excused from any further study and that any past interview comments not be used. This is a situation where a decision made by the school district impacted the level of risk taking at the school level.

Students' Participation in Leadership

There was an inseparability of students and teachers when either group talked or participated in school activities. The respect for one another was personal, and all evidenced a feeling that "we can overcome all odds" steeped in a strong facilitative support of teaching team members, matched by the facilitative support of the principal. Students readily talk about the negotiation and planning that goes on between students and teachers when it comes to program plans and special events for the school. It was most interesting to hear the students speak about "our school" and the belief that "we make the important decisions in the school" that set the stage for all the good things that happen at Stoney Creek School. There is a definite sense that students run a democratic environment in this school and that it is their school. During casual conversations I heard it stated many times that students "believe that the teachers' job is to keep things going in the background and are there for support for everything students do." Students stated that they "felt empowered" by teachers "to become leaders of the school." An upper elementary school student shares her thoughts on "who the main leaders of the school are":

> Students have a lot of say at this school. The teachers get along with students. I really like the way that they are just fun, they are really nice and they're, like, not boring. When they teach they put it in a fun way. I think the teachers and students lead this school equally. In some ways I'm not sure, maybe we have more power to make decisions because we get to make a lot more decisions when it comes to our MicroSociety. In our

> school we get to vote for stuff all the time. Students get to participate in making decisions at Stoney Creek School. The only kind of stuff that we haven't had a lot of say in is, like, our dress code. Even when teachers have to make big decisions about the school they tell you about it so that you can have input.

During a dialogue with a group of junior high students who participate in a weekly leadership class called the Fishco Group which is based on the Fish philosophy of be there, choose your attitude and be committed to the focus (Lunden, et al. 2000, 2002); students constantly referred to the fact that the students at Stoney Creek School are the leaders of the school. However, a student clarifies this thought further with resounding agreement from the other five members of the group:

> I would say for me personally it has been about learning to share the leadership. I'll give you some of me right now. One of the things that's been the hardest for me is to learn the difference between being a leader and leadership. Miss Zorac and I talk about this kind of stuff all the time through our emails back and forth. Moving from leading and keeping myself in the limelight and moving to leadership and putting trust in others has been hard. I'm learning that with giving out directions or giving advice, is that what works for you probably won't work for them.

As demonstrated in the preceding quote, students freely use the language of leadership to talk about their work in the school. Another student in the Fishco Group talks about her leadership interests in relationship to Stoney Creek School:

> The school has definitely made me think in different ways. The reason I'm interested in leadership and the reason I think I'm a

> leader is because of my participation in MicroSociety in grade six. I also have participated in an extra curricular club that allowed me to learn about my potential as a leader. I found out that you couldn't make people do things and shove them into positions. I remember sticking to my point of view to a point where I was blind. I think the best way to learn about leadership is not to memorize some principles of leadership or something like that but to experience it two hundred and sixty degrees.

Teachers saw this enactment of student leadership as one of the greatest compliments that could be paid to teachers at Stoney Creek School. There was the sense that students felt they had the most important say in school activities. In talking to students in all grade levels in casual conversations, many students felt that their opinions were the basis for decisions made. A community volunteer confirmed these conclusions in the following statement:

> I constantly observe that students readily offer assistance to guests in the hallways to help them find their way around the maze-like hallways at Stoney Creek School. As one walks through the school, teachers are engaged in conversation with students all over the place. Some conversations appear more focused on academics and others are just friendly banter. In talking to students they believe that teachers and parents genuinely want them to succeed in life. As I have volunteered here at Stoney Creek for the past few years, I have seen many students come back to visit their previous teachers and I know that some keep in touch by email in order to keep these supportive relationships going.

There is an obvious comfort level between students and teachers at Stoney Creek. In talking to students they know that teachers are constantly reading about the latest research in order to provide excellent education. This was reflected in a conversation with a junior high student. She says:

> If you ever go in the staff room and you look at the walls, all this stuff about planning and leadership and stuff is everywhere. She (the principal) reads a lot. Her and the assistant principals are always looking for the latest stuff to make the school better. Along with this our principal has a speech for everything, principals are trained at making speeches. Her speeches are really motivating and get us thinking about getting our grades better and stuff, about leadership and everything.

Students are aware of the information gleaned from research and students and parents affirm that they have also been kept informed through newsletters, emails and a school web site on these latest trends. This communication has provided for much conversation at home and school helping students to formulate their own opinions and to gain a sense of commitment to Stoney Creek school and to become a part of the Stoney Creek vision.

Upon interviewing the grade nine students, a deep sense of commitment to the school was noted. In fact all wished that they would be able to continue serving the school by volunteering in a leadership capacity. For a few this would be possible, but for many it would not be practical as a result of timing and lack of transportation, because of the distant location of their homes and the new high school they would be attending. However, some parents have committed to driving their child to Stoney Creek School for the purpose of volunteering, because of the impact that Stoney Creek School has had on their child's life. They want to see their child give back to other students "what they have gained."

Parents' Participation in Leadership

As I discussed the concept of parent participation with students, it seemed to be a natural expectation that parents are always around and involved in school activities. In fact students talked about sitting on committees with parents for the purpose of curriculum planning and for hiring teachers. Although when Janice Zorac first arrived at Stoney Creek, parents were skeptical about the new principal's agenda and her genuineness for stakeholder involvement, parents now clearly express appreciation for their personal involvement in the decision making process. A parent who has been involved for four years comments on her personal experience with being involved in Stoney Creek School:

> We aren't spoken to like parents; we're spoken to like partners in our children's education. Some of the schools that I have been in, they treat parents like they're one of the children and tend to try and be the bigger person, like the adult in control of everything. I don't find that happening here. There is a belief that we can find solutions together. We are involved in the decision making process of the school. I have never gotten the feeling that our opinions are considered token. Parents count at Stoney Creek School.

Not only do parents believe their opinion counts, but staff members also believe that parents are important in the decision making process. An assistant principal comments:

> When issues occur in the school, we sit down with all the stakeholders involved and talk about it calmly and figure out

> what we are going to do. We make sure it is solution focused; it's not just a bunch of people sitting around whining. Parents play an important role in the decision making at Stoney Creek. They work side by side with students and teachers in making this the best learning environment possible. Their opinion counts. This is what we see as "shared leadership," we don't run things around here. Even the budget process involves all stakeholders. People feel validated when they have a say in what's going on. Are there things that we can get better at? Of course there is, I think communication is something everybody can get better at. Clear communication on the part of all stakeholders is integral to building positive relationships for growth at Stoney Creek School.

In order for clear communication to take place, it is Janice Zorac's belief that "it is necessary to engage both adults and students in problem analysis and problem solving." Janice and her assistants believe that it is these "deep conversations that lead to shared meaning and informed and responsible decision making that is at the heart of democracy in Stoney Creek School." A long-time parent confirms this with the following statement:

> Although volunteering in the classroom and for fieldtrips is an important part of what we as parents do, most importantly we take part in the planning process for ensuring quality programming for our children. We as parents are involved in many casual and formal conversations about "the work" that is done here at Stoney Creek School. I believe that as a result of all of the open discussion that takes place around here between parents, students and teachers we have been able to implement many quality innovations that have provided a solid basis for student learning.
>
> We have also established relationships based on a lot of trust. Even when the principal is planning ahead or just thinking something through she will give a phone call to a parent to get their opinion on the subject. I have not only experienced this myself but have talked to other parents that have also experienced the same. I know that all of this dialogue has to help us as a team make better decisions. Just being a part of

> the process makes me want to do more for the school and support what others are doing.
>
> We still and probably always will have a few people who sit at the side and whine about what they don't like, but they don't choose to get involved even though they are given every opportunity to do so. Although we listen to these people, we as a group do not choose to validate their whining. I believe that it is important we focus on constructing a team effort and for us this has meant a lot of discussion on every subject matter. It has also meant stepping by those people who choose not to think forward; ultimately they don't want to be left out, so then they finally join in becoming part of our solution oriented process. We as parents talk about the need for us to mentor good leadership skills for our children. This means working along side of our students and teachers in new ways.
>
> Our conversations have changed over the years from "what it is we don't like teachers doing in the classroom" to now "how can we support teachers in growing opportunities for classroom learning?" Janice as the principal has been very instrumental in helping us to see the need for changing our approach. Most importantly she has been a good example in the way that she has kept conversations professional. This new outlook has been very powerful!

Parents talk about a shift and change in the conversations that have taken place over the past six years at Stoney Creek School. They see this as not only a result of Janice Zorac's leadership, but their ability to catch the vision and support all that is going on at Stoney Creek School.

In this chapter we talked about the stakeholders at Stoney Creek School and how they learned that leadership is really about a lot of different things at this school. Through offering various informal and formal opportunities, Janice Zorac's vision of team took on new life. Everyone learned that leadership is about relationships that allow for direction from parents, students and teachers. Although Janice specifically set out to cause change through providing opportunities that would enhance the learning environment at Stoney Creek School, as personal relationships of teachers, students and parents took on new life, momentum in stakeholder support for Stoney Creek School grew. The bar was initially raised as Janice Zorac implemented high expectations. She provided many opportunities for informal and formal conversations about student learning. These conversations ultimately caused teachers to seek answers to new questions as a result of discussions they had.

Through participating in collaborative planning and reflection, teachers *began* to expect more from themselves and their students. "Seeking higher levels of quality of work" then became the motivating factor, which ultimately empowered people to share in the leadership at Stoney Creek School. An evidence of this new type of leadership was the ability to seek ways that would empower all stakeholders for moving the learning forward. Although struggles of giving and taking back power are noted, it is the incremental steps toward taking risks, for trying new innovations and learning together that have empowered everyone to move forward.

In the same way Janice and the teachers provided opportunities for students and parents to participate in many informal and formal discussions about student learning. These conversations empowered students and parents to work along side teachers and support new innovations for moving teaching and learning ahead at Stoney Creek School.

This chapter demonstrates that although the constructing of leadership began with Janice's vision, it soon took on "new life" in which everyone participated in the construction of leadership. Leadership is about working together with a common goal, structured and unstructured conversations and learning times, motivating one another and feeling safe enough to take risks. As momentum was gained in the journey toward constructivist leadership at Stoney Creek School, parents and students became seen as partners along side teachers in a democratic process for ensuring the best educational opportunities for students. Janice's strong orientation to relationships that is foundational in her journey toward becoming a constructivist leader became a catalyst for learning for everyone. As a result teachers took on many of these same caring attributes and true relationships were developed personally and professionally. The various sections of this chapter offer insights into the ways that Janice and her team sought to engender the support, interest and involvement of all stakeholders. They also illustrate some of the tensions staff, parents and students encountered in their efforts to move toward constructivist leadership.

Chapter Seven: Reflections and Recommendations

I begin this chapter by reflecting on the interpretive findings as they are expressed in chapters 5 and 6. Secondly, I provide a summary of the key findings and interpretations as they relate to the specific research questions that guided this investigation. Third, I reflect on how my study informs the extant research literature. Fourth, I reflect on my experiences as a researcher. I conclude by offering recommendations for further research and practice.

Reflections on the Findings: Thematic Analysis

At the outset of this study Janice and I spoke of constructivist leadership regularly but others in the school community did not. As time went on and Janice spoke openly about her thoughts related to leadership, staff and students also began to talk about constructivist leadership. I began to hear this in their conversation approximately four weeks into the study.

Over time the participants in this study came to understand that their efforts to practice constructivist leadership constituted a sort of "journey in progress." Along the way, the face of leadership at Stoney Creek School adapted and changes occurred in the ways staff members functioned. For example, by the end of the study, staff members were readily participating in discussions and making presentations to one another about new teaching and learning strategies they acquired through inservices and through reviewing the latest research. These changes occurred as a result of the characteristics of all who participated and the interactions that took place in the context of positive staff relationships.

As a result of the ongoing changes in the way staff members functioned, leadership became expressed and experienced in a variety of ways at Stoney Creek. In the following discussion I reflect on the key themes that have emerged during this study. These themes are organized under the headings: "The Person is Important," "Strategic Conversations," "Rescripting Stoney Creek School," and "Becoming a Constructivist Leader."

The Person Is Important

Throughout my time at Stoney Creek School I was impressed with the ways in which Janice recognized and responded to the individual needs of staff members. Indeed, my research journal contains regular references to this notion that, at Stoney Creek, "each person is important." And this same notion is imbedded in chapter 5 in the sections entitled "The First Staff Meeting," "A Staff Choice," "New Ways of Performing," "Principal's Thinking During the Change Process," "Principal as Leader;" and in chapter 6 in the sections entitled "High Expectations," "Motivation," "Risk Taking," "Students Participation in Leadership" and "Parents Participation in Leadership." I see this as one of the central themes related to how leadership was experienced at Stoney Creek.

Janice's primary focus was on "the importance of the person." Her perceptions of those she worked with and the ways she sought to evoke conversation seemed to instill confidence and feelings of being valued in each individual. I observed Stoney Creek to have developed an atmosphere in which each person in the school participated in affirming one another.

Janice was open and candid about her focus on "expecting the best" from each individual staff member. She often held discussions with individual staff members about their performance expectations and what she saw in regard to each individual's personal progress. She found herself viewing each person in terms of her relationship with the person as opposed to thinking about them in terms of her role (Lambert, 1998, p. 44). In doing so Janice showed her confidence in each individual which seemed to enable personal growth benefiting all in the school. I observed that as she dialogued with staff members about personal issues she took every opportunity to show that she cared by listening to the needs of the staff member, by offering support and through sharing her own personal experiences. This kind of conversation instilled confidence in the individual and provided support for future change and growth.

She saw "high expectations" as enabling team members to act. Janice's conversations demonstrated a fine balance between "passion" and "compassion." Her dialogue with staff members showed a contagious passion for "student learning," yet it was balanced with a compassion for the struggles teachers faced in meeting the needs of students. She sought to offer hope through always dealing with people respectfully and by physically acknowledging their contributions. Consider, for example, the following statement by Janice Zorac:

> Responsibility to me means there is high ownership. I see this clearly as tying into the whole mission of Stoney Creek School. We want to teach everyone that they need to be responsible to make good choices. When responsibility is shown we need to celebrate its success. I believe people need to be mentoring and instilling responsibility into our young people, it's about intrinsic reward, it's about doing your best because it feels good and you know you've done well. You're making a difference, you have been successful.

In interviews teachers talked about their respect for the way Janice cared for staff members. I noted time and time again, in both formal and informal settings, staff members felt that Janice valued them individually. They saw

Janice as demonstrating this by continuously providing for participation in the decision making process at Stoney Creek School.

Janice also regularly engaged in "acts of kindness." She held many personal one-on-one encouragement conversations with teachers. She regularly wrote encouragement notes. I observed her bringing in lunch for distressed teachers and teaching a class for a sick teacher so that she could go home early. I overheard her calling a teacher at home after she had a rough day at school. And she often placed candy treats on teachers' desks.

Another way that Janice affirmed staff members and students was through recognition of their contributions. She not only recognized individuals for their accomplishments privately, but also in public. Students were recognized for academic achievements and leadership skills demonstrated in the community and at Stoney Creek School. Teachers were recognized for new innovations, participation in guiding student activities, implementation of new teaching techniques or the development of a new thematic unit accentuating the school's focus on thinking skills. Janice often took the opportunity to share these wonderful accomplishments at student assemblies, parent/community meetings and staff meetings. She intentionally sought to personalize the recognition. As she shared these accomplishments she engendered the support and commitment of all those in attendance by helping them to enter into a celebration of the same. In Janice's meticulous presentations or "speeches" as they were lightheartedly referred to by students, she always spoke about the strong teaching staff and excellent education program at Stoney Creek. This was another example of Janice's ability to "generate power" all around and enable others to act or participate in leadership.

Janice was a natural at inviting others into her world. She jokingly made statements about her "worst moments" when she saw herself "being a control freak." She was open with students, parents and teachers about her values, weaknesses and her feelings. She intentionally tried to stop thinking about her role as principal from a traditional framework (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 44). Janice believed that "you have to open up your heart and let people know what you really think and believe." Through talking about her values, she sought to help others find their personal voice by encouraging them to share their personal values. This, she hoped, would in turn allow others to talk about their inadequacies and shortcomings, creating a kind of comfort zone with her and an openness to sharing with others. Janice understood that "emotions are contagious" and that her transparency would allow others to be open and take risks. She believed that each individual staff member must "lead from what they believe" and their being open about their beliefs "would ultimately foster collaboration and build trust amongst others." Janice believed that as staff members participated in leadership their lives would be "an inspiration" to one another.

At Stoney Creek relationships with staff members are key to each individual's personal growth. They found it important to treat each person with trust, respect and dignity. As staff members became comfortable in sharing with one another they noticed that they began to learn from one another and take on the positive attributes of others. This allowed staff members to feel freer to share their personal values, which created more opportunity for learning and growing together.

Strategic Conversations

During my time at Stoney Creek School I sat in on many conversations with Janice Zorac and staff members. After debriefing with Janice about the content of each conversation, I had noted in my journal that these conversations evolved around "what is good for kids," and that they were "strategic." In chapter 5 the notion of "strategic conversation" can be found in the sections entitled "A Mandate for Change," "Setting the Stage for Change," "The First Staff Meeting," "Consultation with Parents and School District," "Exploring Results for Change," "A Staff Choice," "New Ways of Performing," "Principal's Thinking During the Change Process," "Principal as Leader," and in chapter 6, in the sections entitled "Teachers Participation in Leadership," Collaborative Planning and Reflection," "Risk Taking," "Students Participation in Leadership" and "Parents Participation in Leadership."

Janice frequently engaged her staff in what I came to refer to as "strategic conversations." She believed that as principal it was her role to focus the conversation on student learning and to encourage teachers to challenge the status quo when seeking ways of meeting students' learning needs. It was her belief that this "conversational thinking" or "thinking aloud" would evoke participation by all. Indeed, it seemed that tensions arose out of this constant interaction, leading to a communal effort to create a new "shared reality," reflecting common purposes. A sense of mutual professional respect, characterized by a belief in shared responsibility for student learning, emerged from this process.

As a principal, Janice had the same fear most principals have. She worried about the effect of staff that did not want to participate in change at Stoney Creek. But Janice soon realized that, in her words, "true leadership is a dialogue as opposed to a monologue." Prior to her exposure to thinking about constructivist leadership, she believed and acted as though it was important to "manage" such staff skillfully. But as she learned to incorporate the aspirations and views of others while participating in visioning, curriculum planning and delivery, and constant communication, the idea of dissonant staff became seen as an opportunity for engaging in "real life" constructivism.

Janice believed that as staff members worked toward a common vision it was important to share information openly and regularly. Along with speaking at various meetings, Janice implemented a variety of ways for sharing information such as information boards at each entrance to the school, a staff bulletin board, daily email messages and school newsletters. She also provided many opportunities for staff, students and parents to respond to information through email, personal dialogue and phone calls.

In trying to foster a culture that was inquiry based, Janice found that "posing difficult to answer questions" also enhanced professional dialogue amongst staff members (Lambert, 1998, p. 81). When approached by staff members who were distraught about meeting student needs or struggling to find shared solutions, Janice often posed questions rather than offered answers. Consider for example a statement by an assistant principal:

> There is not a lot of gray area with Janice, often it is black or white. It's not that she always believes that she is right. I remember trying to argue with Janice and saying you are really hard to argue with because you ask really good questions. So it's not so much the answers but the questions that get us thinking about how to be creative problem solvers. She doesn't tell you what to do, I guess she is kind of suggesting things through getting me to think, in essence helping me to be responsible. She believes that it is her job to foster an attitude of servant leadership. She looks at how she facilitates the growth process in the school through teaching and learning. As a result teachers around here tend to ask more questions providing opportunities for learning on the part of themselves and others.

Janice's orientation toward this kind of questioning seemed to enable staff members to work together to seek solutions and support one another in difficult times. Teachers found themselves going beyond what they saw as their traditional roles, and in doing so growing professionally. In supporting a shared effort toward solution making, Janice ensured that teachers had opportunities for professional development. These professional development opportunities focused conversation on moving toward academic growth.

Janice believed that for success in shared leadership to occur, there must be a provision for "lots of conversation." Strategic conversation allowed staff members to participate in and create a shared vision, which was important for forward movement and success. Janice's measure of success was in terms of the extent to which all in the school community understood and acted upon the shared vision.

Rescripting Stoney Creek School

As Janice and I chatted on many occasions throughout the research process and through a number of "member checks" I came to realize that they had talked about "rewriting the script of Stoney Creek School" on many occasions. Indeed, I wrote in my journal that we talked about this "rewriting of the script" as we discussed drafts of chapters 5 and 6.

Janice and the staff members sought to come to new understandings and a new way of working together. This meant that everyone would need to be given an opportunity to participate in many conversations for establishing a new vision that would set the tone for the creation of a new culture. As staff members participated in this process they found themselves participating in a "united effort for moving student achievement ahead," ultimately rewriting the script for Stoney Creek School.

When Janice was assigned to Stoney Creek School she was given the task of moving the school forward in all areas of learning. She began with the belief that everything she did would set the tone for developing a new vision and that she would need to break down barriers that encompassed "traditional ways of doing things." In doing so Janice wanted to ensure that teachers had the tools necessary to do their jobs and would not become bogged down with administrative procedures. Janice was aware that somehow during this process everyone would ultimately find a new way of working and together they would move forward with a new vision and "write a new script" for success at Stoney Creek School.

At first Janice was the center of the change activities, with conversations focusing on her vision and her "steering" others in the "right direction." During these times a kind of "rescripting" was taking place. Staff, students and parents were starting to think differently as they participated in discussions about the past, present and future of Stoney Creek School. Gradually this "rescripting" became a united effort on the part of the administration team, ultimately seeing everyone sharing leadership for the changes that occurred. But, at the beginning, Janice and her leadership staff administered the school in "traditional ways," and the process seemed far from constructivist leadership. Over time conversations took a turn as Janice and the leadership staff realized that their desire to explore constructivist leadership was the beginning of a new "journey." For example, an assistant principal spoke about the realization that "they had entered into a relationship that would allow them to share their personal values, ultimately "rescripting" the work of the school." However, they also realized that there was a danger of "stronger personalities" or "issues with power" that could distort the journey toward constructivism. Starratt wrote of this conundrum:

> In other words, the work of the constructivist, which includes the work of deconstructing the presently accepted script, must be carried on with the awareness of the possibility, and more important, the likelihood that one will believe that he or she has the right answer for everyone, has the final solution to the cultural problem of equity or gender relations or the distribution of public resources . . . Knowledge can seduce one into the illusion or certainty, can lead to the illusion of control over what one knows, can lead to the exclusion and silencing of all other points of view. We have to accept the irony of knowledge . . . Thus the constructivists who attempt to rescript the process of schooling must retain the ironist attitude that the rescripting will contain distortions, omissions and latent power relationships. (Starratt, p. 21, 2000)

Thus, Starratt draws attention to the inescapable influence of power relationships in any rescripting effort. Janice came to Stoney Creek with a district mandate for change. This expectation, along with her own personal vision for Stoney Creek School, at times created situations where Janice found herself overlooking the points of view of others. During these times she observed that teachers said they supported the decisions she made but didn't necessarily demonstrate buy- in. Janice's experience was that teachers easily agreed to new innovations of teaching methods because they may have "felt pressured" or needed to be seen as a "district person." However they quickly fell back into their old ways of doing things. In efforts to address this influence of power Janice found that it was important for her to realize that each individual comes with his or her own interpretations and beliefs and other relationship experiences that they bring into their staff relationships. This led her to provide as many opportunities as possible for all staff members to engage in constant dialogue. Janice's strategy of stepping back and asking questions rather than providing direct input was one of her ways of trying to accommodate the power imbalance. This was crucial to Stoney Creek's ongoing journey toward constructivism.

Complicating this journey in progress is the influence by factors external to the school such as school district policies and social norms. Constructivist leadership is played out in a set of "real life" practical circumstances. Principals do their work in what is often a hectic environment characterized by a variety of constraints over which they have little control.

As Janice sought to involve her educational team in rescripting Stoney Creek School they took a step back to hold some initial conversations with all stakeholders in order to understand who they were and what it was they wanted to accomplish as a school. For example, my journal indicates that within the first few months of Janice's becoming principal at Stoney Creek School, she met with all stakeholder groups, which included those who had played a part in the history of the school. Through many conversations Janice sought to help everyone probe deeper into their own lives and the lives of other individuals involved in Stoney Creek School. As principal she was adept at building relationships and encouraging staff members to develop in all areas of their lives. Janice was candid with staff members and parents about her own struggles of balance, struggles of control versus sharing the leadership and the idea of being a change agent versus rewriting a new script together. Although at first her actions did not seem to reflect constructivist values, even then Janice seemed to know that it was important to ask challenging questions to get staff members thinking and participating in the creation of a new culture.

As I got to know Janice, I found that she was not only a "hands-on," "action oriented" principal, but she possessed a special talent for incorporating symbolism into everything that she did. Her office exemplified this in that it contained many stuffed animals, trinkets, books and pictures that illustrate caring, leadership and learning. Such symbols were not only seen in her office but throughout the school. To me, it seemed that this symbolic activity led people to reflect on their own values. Deal and Peterson (1999) noted that symbols and symbolic activity of the principal can build meaning in an organization. Janice was particularly aware of the symbolic nature of what she did and how conversation about symbols and symbolism engaged others in thinking about creating a "new school." Janice understood that symbolism played a powerful role in shaping culture and that, as they critiqued their own values, ideals and convictions, they would find new symbols to represent what they valued together.

Janice understood that in order for a new culture to be enacted at Stoney Creek School it would take the involvement of all stakeholders. She encouraged others to share openly with one another and to find meaning in the process. Through creating a new vision and "writing a new script," she believed that everyone would find a new way of working together.

Becoming a Constructivist Leader

Perhaps the most general theme – one that permeated all of the activities of this study – is that of "becoming a constructivist leader." As I talked with Janice and staff members it grew apparent that there was a story to be told about Stoney Creek School's journey toward constructivism through the personal experiences of the principal.

In many ways, when embarking on her journey toward constructivist leadership, Janice found herself in a struggle between striving towards what she saw as constructivist ideals and her inclination to act in the more traditional administrative ways she had learned and practiced previously. These traditional ways were part of "who she is." Initially, her traditional orientation had her convening many conversations in which she "set the tone" for visioning. But a caring nature and a genuine concern for others were also a part of "who she is." These qualities seemed to be the foundation of Janice's becoming interested in constructivist leadership. And, even though her early leadership activities at Stoney Creek reflected her more traditional orientation, these qualities were evident from the start.

From the beginning, Janice was open about her vision for the future of Stoney Creek School. It was a future to be built on genuine relationships and a strong emphasis on success of all students. Janice sought to refocus conversation and encouraged teachers to challenge the status quo. She provided much direction through inquiry and analysis of data. This worked for the most part, but at times she found herself exerting her own power in order to "move forward" the district's directive of "Focus on Results," and her own goals for the school, rather than allowing for the building together of shared responsibility.

To deal with the "tension" between her traditional background and her desire to act as a constructivist leader, Janice found that she needed to be unambiguous about her strategic intent. That is, she needed to ensure that all knew that she wanted to encourage open dialogue and expression of everyone's opinion. She also felt it necessary for her educational worldview to be transparent through words and deeds. She did this in part through ensuring that many displays and posters were put up around the school. Such modeling ultimately seemed to empower involvement of all staff members in thinking progressively about the work that they did, by engaging in reflection, exploration and experimenting through their teaching.

Janice found it necessary to "step back" at times so that the thoughts, experiences and achievements of others could surface and re-surface during casual and formal conversations. The dialogue was rich with new convictions and ideals as a result of new experiences. One of my journal entries describes a conversation in which a teacher had come to Janice with much excitement. She enthusiastically described a teaching situation where she had tried out a new teaching strategy and the "kids finally got the concept." This teacher went on to share how excited she was at the prospect of sharing this new idea with teachers at their next collaboration meeting. Rather than expand on what else could have been done, Janice chose to encourage and celebrate this occasion with the staff member. Janice found that this "step back" action not only empowered staff, students and parents, it tended to lead to the participation of "quiet leaders." However, Janice knew that stepping back did not mean not being involved.

This helped Janice to reconcile her inclination toward the "top down" traditional style of leadership and her wish to be working from within the team as a constructivist. However, it was not always easy. This "stepping back" action was especially hard for Janice when difficulties arose because of what Janice calls her "motherly attributes." She found it more natural to want to "take care of" or "fix" the situation for staff members rather than allow staff members to work through difficult situations in order to find solutions.

Janice quickly found out that, in her words, "who we are can get in the way" of what is most effective. For example, while initially apprehensive about working with "dissenting staff members," she came to view these people as staff members with valuable opinions. Over time Janice saw that as staff, students and parents worked through difficult issues and participated in solution finding, the whole community grew stronger. Their desire and ability to participate in a constructive process became a natural part of how stakeholders at Stoney Creek School functioned.

As a result of the trust and confidence that stakeholders had in one another it became easier to accept that unresolved issues would not be solved immediately. These issues were seen as healthy opportunities for ongoing learning and growth. This attitude was also reflected in the practice of stamping all documents with the word "Draft" to ensure that nothing was ever viewed as a final product.

Janice observed that it was easy to say that she is a "constructivist leader" or uses "a shared leadership model," but that "who we are can get in the way of what is most effective." As Janice so aptly put it, "somebody just can't go out and say they are a constructivist; it is about becoming a constructivist leader."

Reflections on the Research Questions

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which leadership played out in a school in which the principal had embraced the notion of constructivist leadership. The investigation focused on how leadership was experienced and expressed at Stoney Creek School. The research question that guided this study was: How is leadership experienced and expressed in a school in which the principal acts to mentor leadership of all those in the school? The specific research questions addressed through this study were:

(1) How do those in the school community view the principal's participation in the community? (2) How do those in the school community believe leadership is being sustained? (3) How do those in the school community view the development of relationships within their school community in which the principal acts to mentor leadership? (4) How do those in the school community experience mentorship? (5) How do those in the school community think about themselves as leaders? (6) To what extent, and in what ways, do school community members reflect conceptions of leadership that are "constructivist" in nature? (7) What do those in the school community perceive to be the challenges, contradictions and constraints of developing leadership within the school?

As is often the case with interpretive studies, the research question "evolved" as the study unfolded. In particular, as Janice and I spoke of and read about constructivist leadership (as conceptualized by Lambert), the focus expanded beyond the original emphasis on shared leadership. Certainly shared leadership was always important to Janice, but as the study unfolded, thinking about relationships and about how knowledge and leadership are constructed through relationships became just as important to her. The point here is that Janice's notion of constructivist leadership was enriched as the study progressed. Similarly, the study, which began with a focus on shared leadership, progressed into a focus on broader notions of constructivist leadership. In a sense, the major research question evolved to "How is leadership experienced and expressed in a school in which the principal strives to act as a constructivist leader?"

Although findings related to the research questions guiding this investigation are addressed in chapters 5 and 6 I have provided this summary in order to draw attention to the key points. During the process of data analysis I found that the seven specific research questions formed two natural groupings: Questions #1, #2, #3 and #7 reflect "The Principal as Leader," and questions #4, #5, #6 and #7 reflect "Participation in Constructivist Leadership."

The Principal as Leader

Staff, students and parents at Stoney Creek saw Janice as supportive, but also as a leader that they liked to follow. This theme is evident in the descriptions of Janice's leadership experience found in the following sections of chapter 5: "A Mandate for Change," "Setting the Stage for Change," "The First Staff Meeting," "Consultation with Parents and School District," "A Staff Choice," "Exploring Results for Change," "New Ways of Performing," "Principal's Thinking During the Change Process" and " Principal as Leader."

When assigned to Stoney Creek, Janice was given a job to do and she set out to do it. She developed a vision and sought to convince others of the need for change and to embrace that vision. At first Janice specifically set out to "cause" change that she believed would enhance the learning environment at Stoney Creek School. Although her intent was to promote shared leadership, Janice's actions at first were not of a constructivist nature. Along the way she learned some things about herself. Realizing that, although she desired to be a constructivist leader, it was not always easy. She found that, quite often, district expectations and her own personality traits and beliefs pushed her in other directions. So, Janice's and Stoney Creek School's "journey" toward constructivism was not always smooth. Even six years after her assignment to Stoney Creek, when teachers and administrative staff shared an open commitment to constructivism, teachers still attributed the changes at Stoney Creek to Janice's leadership.

Teachers and parents pay tribute to Janice for her relational qualities that they see as having set them on their way towards constructivist leadership. Janice's caring and personal nature along with her desire to become a constructivist leader became a catalyst for everyone's learning. Ultimately parents and students participated along side teachers and administration in a democratic process aimed at providing the best educational opportunities for students.

Janice's personal journey began by her wanting to be a constructivist as she saw value in the process for everyone at Stoney Creek School. Her experience brought her to understand that she would continuously struggle with her own personal contradictions that come with moving from a traditional leadership style to a constructivist style. She found that "saying you want to be a constructivist leader is only the beginning." The process of becoming a constructivist leader seemed puzzling at times for Janice, especially because she had already viewed herself as a relationship oriented person. Her strong personal character traits also made the experience more complex as she wrestled with issues of power and control. Janice found that grappling with these issues allowed her to "personally grow" as she interacted with staff members.

District and government expectations also played a role in providing for further contradiction and constraint. The demands of district and government made it difficult for Janice to perform in a constructivist manner at times, such as when first year teachers were being laid off due to budget cut backs. The district expectations for a "key focus" on thinking skills at Stoney Creek School also provided for interesting dynamics as Janice sought to implement this district innovation. Teachers were slow to participate as they felt that the implementation of this program was being forced on them. However, although it began as a district expectation, the end result was positive because of the strong relationships that had been built at Stoney Creek.

Although Janice was the center of the change activities in the beginning, staff participated in a positive manner. Janice was open with her staff about her personal struggles and the contradictions that she felt in becoming a constructivist leader. This interaction allowed for a new way of working together.

Participation in Constructivist Leadership

Teachers, parents and students at Stoney Creek participated in and experienced leadership in a variety of ways. Their leadership experiences are explored in the following sections of chapter 6: "Teachers' Participation in Leadership," "Students' Participation in Leadership" and "Parents' Participation in Leadership."

In my journal I found numerous references to times where Janice and the staff members purposely sought to "share the leadership" and to "participate in constructivist leadership." Staff members participated in many conversations for establishing new ways of working together in order to establish a new culture. As staff members participated in this process they found themselves opening up to alternate and more effective ways of learning and leading.

From the outset people seemed to understand that Janice intended to involve them in leadership activities. This consistent focus allowed stakeholders to become engaged in the sharing of leadership. As staff participated in the process, they learned that leadership is about relationships that allow for direction from parents, students and teachers.

It was clear that all stakeholders had participated in setting goals for growth for their personal engagement in leadership and for how they would mentor students in leadership qualities. As a result of this concerted focus, over time teachers, parents and students came to share a strong "together we can do it" mindset. In the same way teachers spoke about a cultural change that had taken place over the past six years. When talking about this change, teachers, parents and students referred to the many activities of collaboration, planning and reflection that they had done together.

"High expectations" for teachers increased the commitment of all teachers in supporting one another to move forward in their personal learning and growth in constructive leadership skills. Teachers freely participated in weekly collaboration times which not only increased the ability for teachers to work together but was a positive stimulus for their own professional growth. As people saw growth in their own learning, this in turn strengthened their support for the cultural change at Stoney Creek School.

Although some teachers struggled with the process for collaborating, they believed that this activity was essential to ongoing growth for everyone. In support of this innovation, parents also commented on the "necessity of providing time for teachers to collaborate" as this in their minds had "improved the overall quality of the program." Collaboration provided for many formal and informal conversations about student learning. These conversations in which students, parents and teachers took part, seemed to empower them to participate in leadership.

Although staff at Stoney Creek felt empowered, they came to realize that not all leadership activities in the school could be classed as "shared leadership." There were decisions that Janice made without the involvement of staff. This behavior was not a source of dissention, staff remained enthusiastic and embraced opportunities to participate in leadership. This may have been because they understood that Janice was open to conversation about the times she made decisions without their involvement. Staff members realized that the open conversations that were held through collaboration, planning and reflection allowed them to establish stronger relationships and this allowed for new ways of working together.

Reflections on the Literature

My reflections on the literature are presented below under the headings: "Important Points about Constructivist Leadership" and "A Contribution to the Literature."

Important Points about Constructivist Leadership

Janice's experiences in striving to be a constructivist leader support the view that principals acting as constructivist leaders require a much more complex set of skills and understandings than ever before (Lambert, 1988, p. 24). Lambert (1988) believes: "These learning processes require finely honed skills in communication, group process facilitation, inquiry, conflict mediation, and dialogue." This applies to both principals and teachers.

When Janice began her efforts to move toward constructivism, teachers didn't feel comfortable in talking with others about their strengths and abilities, for fear of being perceived as "grandstanding" or "tooting their own horn." However, as time went on, they became willing to share their specialized skills and knowledge with others. Teachers also saw the need to become specialists or leaders in their area of knowledge. They began to see how the sharing of their knowledge brought together their sense of shared values. In the same way teachers also learned to celebrate one another's victories. As teachers and administrators opened up to this kind of sharing, there was strong support and a willingness to learn new things from one another and to try new things together.

Just as Lambert (1998, p. 86) suggests, Janice planned approaches for leading conversations that originated in a group setting. This strategy engendered a sense of safety for all individuals to explore ideas and assisted participants to learn from one another. She constantly posed questions and framed questions that helped people to become involved in self-construction and collegial interaction (Lambert, 1988, p. 58). As she did this, the level of trust and honesty increased so that professional acceptance of each other for the good of all could be received. Lambert (1988, p. 27) states:

> When a principal uses the authority of the position to convene and sustain the conversation, and demonstrates for a staff and school community the enabling behaviors listed above, the school is on a sure road toward building leadership capacity.

This resonates with what I saw at Stoney Creek School. I observed that when Janice sought to enable more and more individuals to build their own informal authority and to become involved in leadership, staff seemed to come together in a form of skillful broad-based participation in the work of leadership.

Janice's constant commitment to strengthening relationships amongst staff members, and to supporting conversations that revolved around programming and "what's best for kids," seemed to allow her and others to demonstrate that they valued the leadership and opinions of others. Another factor in developing relationships for rewriting the script for Stoney Creek School was the need to go back and explore the past (Starratt, 2000). Janice, teachers and parents found it necessary to review past events in order to identify the lifelong themes of the school and make sense of the world as it currently existed in order to plan for the future (Starratt, 2000). They believed they could enrich the future by recalling the richness of past experiences. This kind of dialogue allowed for the development of leadership skills through the connections made or learning processes that unfolded within the context of relationships in Stoney Creek School. Ultimately, staff members at Stoney Creek School came to understand that it is important to be aware that leadership exists in all the activities of learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively.

A Contribution to the Literature

Janice and staff at Stoney Creek learned that Constructivism is about "becoming." Previous research has focused on what a constructivist leader is, but not much has been written about the dynamics and struggles that take place while trying to become a constructivist leader. I could find nothing written about struggles of principals who have grown up in and have been trained in a traditional framework of schooling, yet consciously have made the decision to be a constructivist leader. This study has allowed me to look candidly at such an experience and to gain an understanding of the impact on those who are involved in the school.

Through this study I realized that very seldom does a group of people get together and decide they want to run a school on the premise of "shared leadership." Often the principal is the person who spearheads the cause because he or she has been specifically given the mandate to fix the school up, change its direction or move the school ahead in achievement. If this is so, the way a process of change often begins may be in opposition to the ideals of constructivism, and may lead to similar tensions as those experienced at Stoney Creek. The principal may move ahead with enthusiasm, having made the decision to be a constructivist, but may also find herself or himself adapting and changing while trying to accommodate a variety of circumstances. Principals face many new "realities" along the way such as impinging expectations of district and government, their personal relationship styles, and the struggle of shifting from being a traditional leader to sharing leadership as a constructivist.

This study fleshes out the claims of Lambert et al. (2002) by recognizing the uniqueness of every school context and every school principal's values, beliefs and experiences with leading. As I looked back in my journal over the course of this study I noted time and time again a "caution" about implementing models of school leadership that a school leader has chosen because she or he sees it as a "silver bullet." There seem to be hazards related to this kind of thinking. Implementing a new model without engaging all those in the school community in a process of considering such a move carefully, may well be destructive to the relationships among all those involved in the school, and could stymie the process of learning for children in the school. I believe it is important to temper "zeal" for ideas that promise "one size fits all" with caution rooted in understanding that such changes need to be made in relationship with the others in the school community. It is important for schools and principals to consider their own specific characteristics and needs before they implement models of school leadership. When approached with such "advice" in mind, this study suggests that constructivist leadership may serve as a catalyst for ensuring individuality while also engaging all those in the school community in a democratic process. Such a process can encourage difficult conversations that take time, patience and respect among one another for the deconstruction and reconstruction of new meaning (Starratt 2002).

The claim of constructivist leadership is that it is a break from traditional models (Lambert et al., 2002). My research however suggests that in a school system, bureaucratic leadership is likely to prevail with the possibility of episodes of constructivist leadership. With underlying district expectations and teacher/government negotiations bearing heavily on all that she had to do, Janice's constant "striving" and "struggle" toward constructivist leadership demonstrates the impact that bureaucracy can have on a leader's efforts to be a constructivist leader. An example of this was the teacher strike action and the resulting necessity for the school district to release teachers. This seriously strained relationships and altered the ways in which teachers made sense of their world together. Such bureaucratic happenings impinged on Janice's efforts to perform in a constructivist manner. Thus Janice did not always act as a constructivist leader, rather, she experienced episodes of constructivist leadership. By episode, I mean a time such as described by an assistant principal during which relationships come to the center of what is being done, a sense of equality permeates the school, and one sees:

> shared leadership that empowers staff to develop to their fullest potential while interacting with one another. There is a deep sense that we all need to be positive role models for the kids. Therefore the conversations in the staff room are much different than conversations in staff rooms I've been in before. They are very kid focused, there's no kid bashing, there's a little bit of what we did on the weekend, which is fine, but it's mostly focused on what we're doing in class. We talk about how can you do it better? Can you and I get together and figure something out? We need to do this presentation, can we use your class time? Most of our conversation revolves around delivering curriculum to kids and making school a more positive, real life experience for them. We seem to speak a common vocabulary as a result of this collaborative work. It really lifts me up when I walk in on those conversations.

But not all of the leadership activities at Stoney Creek could be described as constructivist. My study suggests that those who strive to be constructivist leaders will struggle with contradictions in policy statements that call for results in standardized academic excellence as well as for sharing the responsibility of leadership. For example, the ideology of Professional Learning Communities, as it is outlined in the report and recommendations from the Alberta Commission on Learning (Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds; Oct. 2003), calls upon leaders to combine the notion of "community of learners" with an almost solitary focus on improving test scores. These two notions are not necessarily a "comfortable fit." Such contradictory guidelines challenge schools such as Stoney Creek, which are striving to become more constructivist in their work. They must do so without the authority to construct, or even challenge, a critical "taken for granted" aspect of schooling (that their primary goal is to test scores). This raises questions for researchers who would seek to inform future policy direction and practice. Questions include: Who is accountable? What do we mean by accountability? How in a democratic society do we reconcile the conflicting values of collaboration and competition?

I contend that this study illustrates that constructivist leadership is "a work in progress." Whatever the beginning or reason for implementation, no one can just say they are a constructivist. I argue that constructivist leadership is a process of becoming; there is really no final arrival date. It is a combination of continuous learning and leading that is unending.

Reflections on My Experience as a Researcher

This study provided me with the opportunity to learn more about constructivist leadership. I found that the participants were candid and honest with me in both informal and formal conversations. Therefore I believe I obtained a "realistic snapshot in time" of leadership practices in Stoney Creek School.

The interpretive methodology allowed me to participate and interact with the participants in the study, allowing me to gain a stronger understanding of their perspectives, struggles and successes in striving to become constructivist leaders. The methodology chosen was a natural fit and complemented this study on constructivist leadership.

As I met with Janice Zorac to review the final chapter, it was interesting to hear her comments while reading. She really connected with what she called the "fly on the wall" approach. Janice felt that the observations had been unobtrusive in nature and this was reflected in the writing. She also believed that the style of writing presentation reflected the style of research that had taken place. Janice found this approach allowed her to reflect further on her leadership style and to gain new insights into how she was perceived by staff members. Most interesting was Janice's comment that she believed "her leadership experience had been accurately portrayed."

I found it was important to be sensitive during the research process to the timing of when to pursue observations, when to observe more closely and when to take a step back. At times I found that the mere busyness of staff members' schedules got in the way of my observing closely. I would often go home feeling I had not gotten much data when in fact, as I later reflected on the experience, there was a lot of information to be gleaned. I found that because of the vagueness and ambiguity of the process it was easy to pass by important happenings. I found myself at times wishing for more structure because of this feeling. I found that it took a concerted effort to be aware of everything that was going on around me.

This experience showed me that as much as I have believed that I am a constructivist leader, I am more than ever aware that it is a process of becoming for me too and that there are impinging bureaucratic implications that effect my actions. As I wrote the early drafts of this study I became very aware that at first even the language that I used did not reflect a constructivist paradigm. I found myself using language that reflected cause, generalizations, and "truth." I also found that it was important for me to be aware of my personal biases and how they may influence the study. This concern is similar to the concerns of distortions, omissions and latent power relationships that Starratt (2000) refers to in his writing.

I also spent a lot of time thinking about my own experience as a principal and probably how similar my own personal experience had been to that of Janice's. I must admit that I don't think that I had truly understood my "journey of becoming a constructivist leader" until I lived it again vicariously through Janice's experience.

Recommendations for Practice

As I thought about making recommendations for practice, I realized that I was uncomfortable with the notion of making a list of specific recommendations. Each school and each person's set of circumstances is very different. Each will need to make his or her own "list." But I do think that their work in creating their lists can be informed by this study. As a starting point, I suggest that thinking about constructivist leadership holds a lot of promise for contemporary schools. The experience at Stoney Creek suggests that this is so.

Because there is no one set path for making a transition from traditional leadership to that of a constructivist leadership, I suggest that the principals and others in schools who are interested in pursuing constructive leadership be patient with themselves. It is an ongoing journey with many twists and turns. And for principals, it is important to accept that being a directive leader is often a bureaucratic requirement. The experience of trying to become a constructivist leader will lead to personal changes and, I contend, will ultimately inspire others.

Many staff members will choose to participate in the process of becoming constructivist leaders, but there are those who will not participate, and that too is okay. This is a "process of becoming;" it cannot be forced.

Recommendations for Further Research

As outlined earlier in this report, there has been very little research done on constructivist leadership. In particular this study demonstrates the need for more information on the initial implementation of constructivist leadership in schools. Possible research questions might be: How does one get the process going? Can the process begin in a more constructivist way as opposed to Janice's experience of beginning with a traditional leadership style with the intention of evolving to a more constructivist style. Findings from future research, in this light, has the potential to: (i) address principals needs concerning the tension between bureaucratic and constructivist leadership styles, and (ii) how principals can prepare themselves for a constructivist way of leadership in light of the struggle to reconcile the impact of conflicting values of collaboration and competition.

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Appendices

Appendix A

First Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Adult

The following prompts and questions are for the purpose of focused conversation. Therefore dialogue will be emergent and I will let the participant take the lead.

1. Tell me about your school.
   (Prompt): What makes it special?

2. Tell me about the atmosphere at your school.
   (Prompt): How do you feel about the environment? Is it a relaxed atmosphere?

3. Tell me about relationships in your school.
   (Prompt): How do relationships develop in your school?

4. Tell me about the decision making process at your school.
   (Prompt): Who participates in the decision making process? How are decisions made?

5. Tell me about issues that have arisen in your school.
   (Prompt): What were the circumstances that caused these issues? How were they addressed? Who took responsibility for dealing with the issues?

6. Tell me about the leadership process in your school.
   (Prompt): Who is involved in leadership? What is the level of participation and interaction? When you think about leadership in your school, what do you think about?

7. Tell me about your school community and how you believe leadership is being sustained.
   (Prompt): What would happen to the leadership process if your principal was transferred?

8. What does the principal's participation in the school community look like?
   (Prompt): How does the principal mentor leadership? What are the differences between the way this principal acts and the way other principals you have worked for act?

9. What does it mean to you to be involved in a school where constructivist leadership is used?

(Prompt): Do you think this is different from other leadership used in other schools? At what times do you see the school acting that way? At what times don't you?

Appendix B

First Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Child

The following prompts and questions are for the purpose of focused conversation. Age appropriate language will be adjusted to ensure relevance to the child participant. Therefore dialogue will be emergent and I will let the participant take the lead.

1. Tell me about your school.
   (Prompt): What makes it special?

2. Tell me about your classmates.
   (Prompt): How do you and your classmates participate in leadership in your school? Is it a relaxed atmosphere?

3. Tell me about the teachers in your school.
   (Prompt): How do teachers work with students?

4. How are decisions made in your school?
   (Prompt): Who participates in making decisions? How are decisions made?

5. Tell me about a problem that has happened at your school.
   (Prompt): What were the causes of the problem? How was the problem dealt with? Who took responsibility for dealing with the problem?

6. Who are the leaders in your school?
   (Prompt): Are teachers, leaders? Who all is involved in leadership? How much do these people participate in the leadership of the school?

7. If your principal moved away what do you think would change at your school?
   (Prompt): What would happen to the leadership process if your principal was transferred?

8. How does your principal work with other teachers, and students?
   (Prompt): In what ways does your principal act as a leader?

9. What do you do to make your school a better place?
   How do you think about yourself as a leader?
   (Prompt): Are you a leader in the school?

Appendix C

Letter of Explanation for Proposed Research

Dear Parents and students,

My name is Del Bouck and I am a doctoral student in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. As part of my doctoral program, I am conducting a research study on how leadership is experienced and expressed at ______ School. Your school has a reputation for providing successful and innovative education programs. I believe that by bringing together the perspectives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators, my study has the potential to provide practical insights into how we can make all of our schools the best learning environments for young people.

During this study I will be talking to parents, students, teachers, and administrators within _____ School. I initially asked your , _____ ______ about involving _____ School in my research project due to it's exemplary status within ________ Public Schools. After visiting the school I can understand why your school has its excellent reputation.

I look forward to meeting and talking with parents and students, and will be at the school two days per week starting March 4 to May 8, 2003. Persons chosen for individual interviews will participate in two, one-hour interviews. Myself and/or a research assistant will interview them. Participants will have the right to opt out at any time without penalty, harm or loss of benefit. The final written report will be completed next fall. At that time, I will be available to speak with interested parents and students.

Thank you for your cooperation and support in this endeavor. It is my hope that _____ School's involvement in this study will be a positive and rewarding experience for everyone. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at the school or through _____ ______.

Sincerely,

Del Bouck

Appendix D

Letter & Consent Form for Parent or Guardian

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am writing this letter to seek your permission to involve your son/daughter in a research project about leadership at ______ School. Further to our telephone conversation, I have enclosed a copy of the ethics review form for this study, which was submitted and approved by the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta. As shared in our telephone conversation, all information will be kept confidential and a pseudo-name will be used to ensure the anonymity of your child. Your child will be interviewed for one hour on two separate occasions. Your child has the right to opt out of participating in this research study without penalty, harm or loss of benefit.

A copy of the final study will be made available to you when it has been completed next fall. A copy of the interview transcript will be provided to you so that you and your child can verify the contents of the transcript in order to ensure that I have captured the correct meaning. You may request to have any part or the entire transcript removed at any time. I will also be available to answer any questions that you might have at that time.

Thank you for considering my request to have __________________ participate in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 462-2627 or contact my supervising professor, Rosemary Foster at _______. If at this time you are prepared to give written consent to have ___________________ participate, please sign below and return to me.

Sincerely,

Del Bouck

I, ___________________, give permission to Del Bouck to interview my daughter/son, ___________________ for one hour on two separate occasions for the purpose of this study on how leadership is experienced and expressed in ______ School. I understand that he/she can opt out at any time from this study without penalty, harm, or loss of benefit. He/she may decline to answer any questions that he/she feels necessary, and will be given the opportunity to make appropriate changes to the research when required. In regard to the data collected, my child and I will have the opportunity to see all transcripts and provide feedback. Nothing will be printed without my consent.

______________________ signature

______________________ date

Appendix E

Letter & Consent Form for Teacher

Dear ___________________,

I am writing this letter to seek your consent to participate in a research project about how leadership is experienced and expressed at ______ School. As an educational staff member your participation is important to the success of this study. Your participation will involve two individual, one-hour interviews with myself and/or a research assistant. You will have the right to opt out at any time without penalty, harm or loss of benefit. Transcripts of your interviews will be provided to you for your approval before any information is documented. All information will be kept confidential and pseudo-names will be used to ensure anonymity. I have enclosed a copy of the ethics review form for this study, which was submitted and approved by the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta.

A copy of the final study will be made available to you when it has been completed next fall. I will also be available to answer any questions that you might have at that time.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your participation in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 462-2627 or contact my supervising professor, Rosemary Foster at _______. If at this time you are prepared to give written consent to participate in this study, please sign below and return to me.

Sincerely,

Del Bouck

I, ______________________, give consent to Del Bouck to be interviewed for one hour on two separate occasions for the purpose of this study on how leadership is experienced and expressed in ______ School. I understand that I can opt out from this study at any time without penalty, harm or loss of benefit. I may decline to answer any questions that I feel necessary, and will be given the opportunity to make appropriate changes to the research when required. In regard to data collected I will have the opportunity to see all transcripts and provide feedback. Nothing will be printed without my consent.

______________________ signature

______________________ date

Appendix F

Letter & Consent Form for Parent Interview

Dear ____________,

I am writing this letter to seek your consent to participate in a research project about how leadership is experienced and expressed at ______ School. As a parent your participation is important to the success of this study. Your participation will involve two individual one-hour interviews. You will have the right to opt out at any time without penalty, harm or loss of benefit. Transcripts of your interviews will be provided to you for your approval before any information is recorded. All information will be kept confidential and pseudo-names will be used to ensure anonymity. I have enclosed a copy of the ethics review form for this study, which was submitted and approved by the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta.

A copy of the final study will be made available to you when it has been completed next fall. I will also be available to answer any questions that you might have at that time.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your participation in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 462-2627 or contact my supervising professor, Rosemary Foster at _______. If at this time you are prepared to give written consent to participate in this study, please sign below and return to me.

Sincerely,

Del Bouck

I, ____________________, give consent to Del Bouck to be interviewed for one hour on two separate occasions for the purpose of this study on how leadership is experienced and expressed in ______ School. I understand that I can opt out from this study at any time without penalty, harm or loss of benefit. I may decline to answer any questions that I feel necessary, and will be given the opportunity to make appropriate changes to the research when required. In regard to data collected I will have the opportunity to see all transcripts and provide feedback. Nothing will be printed without my consent.

______________________ signature

______________________ date

Appendix G

Letter & Consent Form for Student Interview

Dear ____________,

I am writing this letter to seek your consent to participate in a research project about how leadership is experienced and expressed at ______ School. As a student your participation is important to the success of this study. Your participation will involve two individual one-hour interviews. Transcripts of your interviews will be provided to you for your approval before any information is recorded. All information will be kept confidential and pseudonames (you may select a code name) will be used to ensure anonymity. I have enclosed a copy of the ethics review form for this study, which was submitted and approved by the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta.

A copy of the final study will be made available to you when it has been completed next fall. I will also be available to answer any questions that you might have at that time.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your participation in this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 462-2627 or contact my supervising professor, Rosemary Foster at _______. If at this time you are prepared to give written consent to participate in this study, please sign below and return to me.

Sincerely,

Del Bouck

I, ____________________, give consent to Del Bouck to be interviewed for one hour on two separate occasions for the purpose of this study on how leadership is experienced and expressed in ______ School. I understand that I can opt out from this study at any time without penalty, harm or loss of benefit. I may decline to answer any questions that I feel necessary, and will be given the opportunity to make appropriate changes to the research when required. In regard to data collected I will have the opportunity to see all transcripts and provide feedback. Nothing will be printed without my consent.

______________________ signature

______________________ date

Appendix H

Research Assistant/Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Project title:

I, ____, the *Research Assistant/Transcriber*, agree to:

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s).*

2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.

3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.

4. after consulting with the *Researcher(s),* erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

Research Assistant/Transcriber

________________________ ________________________ ____________________

(print name) (signature) (date)